

Renaissance Art in Fifteenth-Century Italy



20-1 • Paolo Uccello NICCOLÒ DA TOLENTINO LEADING THE CHARGE
Detail from *The Battle of San Romano* (FIG. 20-24), 1438-1440. Tempera on wood panel. National Gallery, London.

Renaissance Art in Fifteenth-Century Italy

This ferocious but bloodless battle seems to take place in a dream, but it depicts a historical event (FIG. 20-1). Under an elegantly fluttering banner, the Florentine general Niccolò da Tolentino leads his men against the Sienese at the Battle of San Romano, which took place on June 1, 1432. The battle rages across a shallow stage defined by the debris of warfare arranged in a neat pattern on a pink ground and backed by blooming hedges. In the center foreground, Niccolò holds aloft a baton of command, the sign of his authority. His bold gesture—together with his white horse and outlandish, though quite fashionable, crimson and gold damask hat—ensures that he dominates the scene. His knights charge into the fray, and when they fall, like the soldier at the lower left, they join the many broken lances on the ground—all arranged in conformity with the new mathematical depiction of receding space called **linear perspective**, posed to align with the implied lines that would converge at a single point on the horizon.

An eccentric Florentine painter nicknamed Paolo Uccello (“Paul Bird”) created the panel painting (see FIG. 20-24) from which the detail in FIGURE 20-1 is taken. It is one of three related panels—now separated, hanging in major museums

in Florence, London, and Paris—commissioned by Leonardo Bartolini Salimbeni (1404–1479), who led the Florentine governing Council of Ten during the war against Lucca and Siena. Uccello’s remarkable accuracy when depicting armor from the 1430s, heraldic banners, and even fashionable fabrics and crests surely would have appealed to Leonardo’s civic pride. The hedges of oranges, roses, and pomegranates—all ancient fertility symbols—suggest that Leonardo might have commissioned the paintings at the time of his wedding in 1438. Leonardo and his wife, Maddalena, had six sons, two of whom inherited the paintings.

According to a complaint brought by Damiano, one of the heirs, Lorenzo de’ Medici, the powerful *de facto* ruler of Florence, “forcibly removed” the paintings from Damiano’s house. They were never returned, and Uccello’s masterpieces are recorded in a 1492 inventory as hanging in the Medici palace. Perhaps Lorenzo, who was called “the Magnificent,” saw Uccello’s heroic pageant as a trophy more worthy of a Medici merchant prince. We will certainly discover that princely patronage was a major factor in the genesis of the Italian Renaissance as it developed in Florence during the early years of the fifteenth century.

LEARN ABOUT IT

20.1 Examine how sculptors were instrumental in the early development of the Italian Renaissance by increasing the lifelike qualities of human figures and drawing inspiration from ancient Roman sculpture.

20.2 Explore how an interest in scientific investigation blossomed into the development and use of linear perspective throughout fifteenth-century Italian painting.

20.3 Assess the role of wealthy merchants and *condottieri* in driving the development of Renaissance art and architecture.

20.4 Consider how the new focus on artistic competition and individual achievement created a climate for innovative and ambitious works.

HUMANISM AND THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

By the end of the Middle Ages, the most important Italian cultural centers lay north of Rome in the cities of Florence, Milan, and Venice, and in the smaller duchies of Mantua, Ferrara, and Urbino. Both political power and artistic patronage were dominated by wealthy families: the Medici in Florence, the Montefeltro in Urbino, the Gonzaga in Mantua, the Visconti and Sforza in Milan, and the Este in Ferrara (MAP 20-1). Cities grew in wealth and independence as people migrated from the countryside in unprecedented numbers. As in northern Europe, commerce became increasingly important. Money conferred status, and a shrewd business or political leader could become very powerful. The period saw the rise of mercenary armies led by entrepreneurial (and sometimes brilliant) military commanders called *condottieri*, who owed allegiance only to those who paid them well; their employer might be a city-state, a lord, or even the pope. Some *condottieri*, like Niccolò da Tolentino (see FIG. 20-1), became rich and famous. Others, like Federico da Montefeltro (see FIG. 20-31), were lords or dukes themselves, with territories of their own in need of protection. Patronage of the arts was an important public activity with political overtones. As one Florentine merchant, Giovanni Rucellai, succinctly noted, he supported the arts “because they serve the glory of God, the honour of the city, and the commemoration of myself” (cited in Baxandall, p. 2).

The term Renaissance (French for “rebirth”) was only applied to this period by later historians. However, its origins lie in the thought of Petrarch and other fourteenth-century Italian writers, who emphasized the power and potential of human beings for great individual accomplishment. These Italian humanists also looked back at the thousand years extending from the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire to their own day and determined that the achievements of the Classical world were followed by what they perceived as a period of decline—a “middle” or “dark” age. They proudly saw their own era as a third age characterized by a revival or rebirth (“renaissance”), when humanity began to emerge from what they erroneously saw as intellectual and cultural stagnation to appreciate once more the achievement of the ancients and the value of rational, scientific investigation. They looked to the accomplishments of the Classical past for inspiration and instruction, and in Italy this centered on the heritage of ancient Rome. They sought the physical and literary records of the ancient world—assembling libraries, collecting sculpture and fragments of architecture, and beginning archaeological investigations. Their aim was to live a rich, noble, and productive life—usually within the framework of Christianity, but always adhering to a school of philosophy as a moral basis.

Artists, like the humanists, turned to Classical antiquity for inspiration, emulating what they saw in ancient Roman sculpture and architecture, even as they continued to fulfill commissions for predominantly Christian subjects and buildings. But from the

secular world a number of home furnishings such as birth trays and marriage chests have survived, richly painted with allegorical and mythological themes (see “The Morelli–Nerli Wedding Chests,” page 616). Patrons began to collect art for their personal enjoyment.

Like Flemish artists, Italian painters and sculptors increasingly focused their attention on rendering the illusion of physical reality. They did so in a more analytical way than the northerners. Rather than seeking to describe the detailed visual appearance of nature through luminosity and textural differentiation, Italian artists aimed at achieving lifelike but idealized weighty figures set within a rationally configured space organized through strict adherence to a mathematical system called linear perspective, which achieved the illusion of a measured and continuously receding space (see “Renaissance Perspective,” page 610).

FLORENCE

In seizing Uccello’s battle painting (see FIG. 20-1), Lorenzo de’ Medici was asserting the role his family had come to expect to play in the history of Florence. The fifteenth century witnessed the rise of the Medici from among the most successful of a newly rich middle class (primarily merchants and bankers) to become the city’s virtual rulers. Unlike the hereditary aristocracy, the Medici emerged from obscure roots to make their fortune in banking; from their money came their power.

The competitive Florentine atmosphere that had fostered mercantile success and civic pride also cultivated competition in the arts and encouraged an interest in ancient literary texts. This has led many to consider Florence the cradle of the Italian Renaissance. Under Cosimo the Elder (1389–1464), the Medici became leaders in intellectual and artistic patronage. They sponsored philosophers and other scholars who wanted to study the Classics, especially the works of Plato and his followers, the Neoplatonists. Neoplatonism distinguished between the spiritual (the ideal or Idea) and the physical (Matter) and encouraged artists to represent ideal figures. But it was writers, philosophers, and musicians—and not artists—who dominated the Medici Neoplatonic circle. Architects, sculptors, and painters learned their craft in apprenticeships and were therefore considered manual laborers. Nevertheless, interest in the ancient world rapidly spread from the Medici circle to visual artists, who gradually began to see themselves as more than laborers. Florentine society soon recognized their best works as achievements of a very high order.

Although the Medici were the *de facto* rulers, Florence was considered a republic. The Council of Ten (headed for a time by Salimbeni, who commissioned Uccello’s *Battle of San Romano*) was a kind of constitutional oligarchy where wealthy men formed the government. At the same time, the various guilds wielded tremendous power; guild membership was a prerequisite for holding government office. Consequently, artists could look to the Church and the state—the city government and the guilds—as well as private individuals for patronage, and these patrons expected the



MAP 20-1 • FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

Powerful families divided the Italian peninsula into city-states: the Medici in Florence, the Visconti and Sforza in Milan, the Montefeltro in Urbino, the Gonzaga in Mantua, and the Este in Ferrara. After 1420, the popes ruled Rome, while in the south Naples and Sicily were French and then Spanish (Aragonese) territories. Venice maintained its independence as a republic.

artists to reaffirm and glorify their achievements with works that were not only beautiful but intellectually powerful.

ARCHITECTURE

The defining civic project of the early years of the fifteenth century was the completion of Florence Cathedral with a magnificent dome over the high altar. The construction of the cathedral had

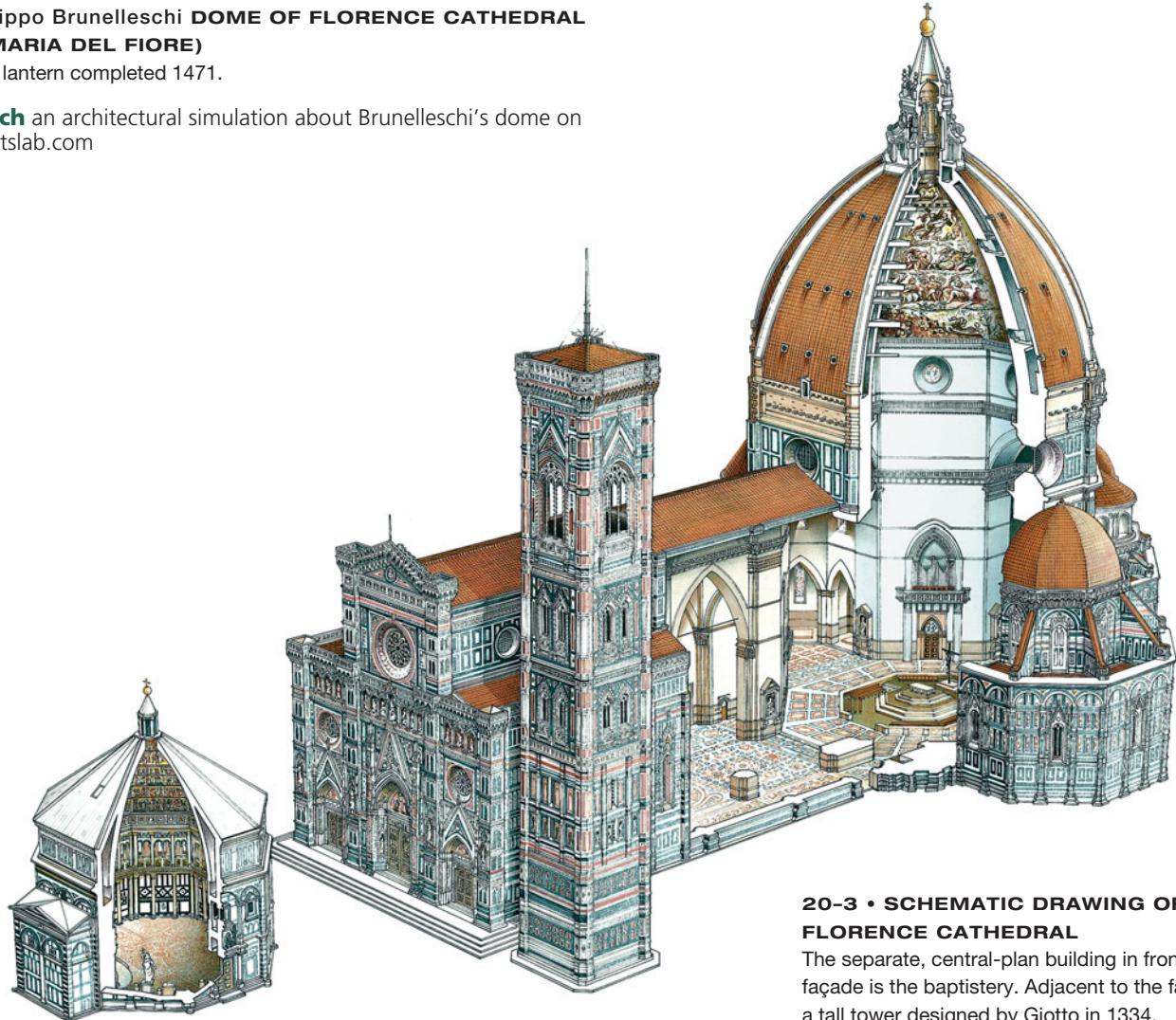
begun in the late thirteenth century and had continued intermittently during the fourteenth century. As early as 1367, builders had envisioned a very tall dome to span the huge interior space of the crossing, but they lacked the engineering know-how to construct it. When interest in completing the cathedral revived, around 1407, the technical solution was proposed by a young sculptor-turned-architect, Filippo Brunelleschi.



**20-2 • Filippo Brunelleschi DOME OF FLORENCE CATHEDRAL
(SANTA MARIA DEL FIORE)**

1420–1436; lantern completed 1471.

 **Watch** an architectural simulation about Brunelleschi's dome on myartslab.com



**20-3 • SCHEMATIC DRAWING OF
FLORENCE CATHEDRAL**

The separate, central-plan building in front of the façade is the baptistery. Adjacent to the façade is a tall tower designed by Giotto in 1334.

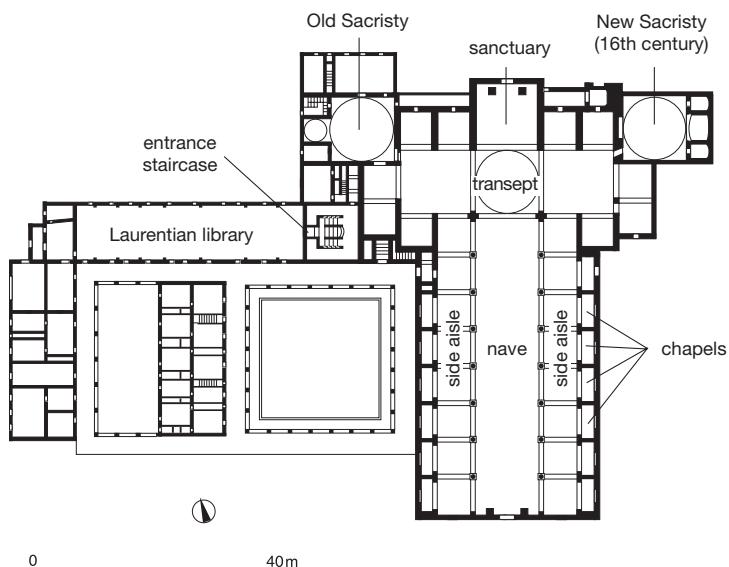
FILIPPO BRUNELLESCHI Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) achieved what many considered impossible: He solved the problem of the dome of Florence Cathedral. Brunelleschi had originally trained as a goldsmith (see “The Competition Reliefs,” page 603). To further his education, he traveled to Rome to study ancient Roman sculpture and architecture, and it was on his return to Florence that he tackled the dome. After the completion of a tall octagonal drum in 1412, Brunelleschi designed the dome itself in 1417, and it was built between 1420 and 1436 (FIGS. 20-2, 20-3). A revolutionary feat of engineering, the dome is a double shell of masonry 138 feet across. The octagonal outer shell is supported on eight large and 16 lighter ribs. Instead of using a costly and even dangerous scaffold and centering, Brunelleschi devised a system in which temporary wooden supports were cantilevered out from the drum. He moved these supports up as building progressed. As the dome was built up course by course, each portion of the structure reinforced the next one. Vertical marble ribs interlocked with horizontal sandstone rings, connected and reinforced with iron rods and oak beams. The inner and outer shells were linked internally by a system of arches. When completed, this self-buttressed unit required no external support to keep it standing.

An oculus (round opening) in the center of the dome was surmounted by a lantern designed in 1436. After Brunelleschi’s death, this crowning structure, made up of Roman architectural forms, was completed by another Florentine architect, Michelozzo di Bartolomeo (1396–1472). The final touch—a gilt-bronze ball by Andrea del Verrocchio—was added in 1468–1471 (but replaced in 1602 with a smaller one).

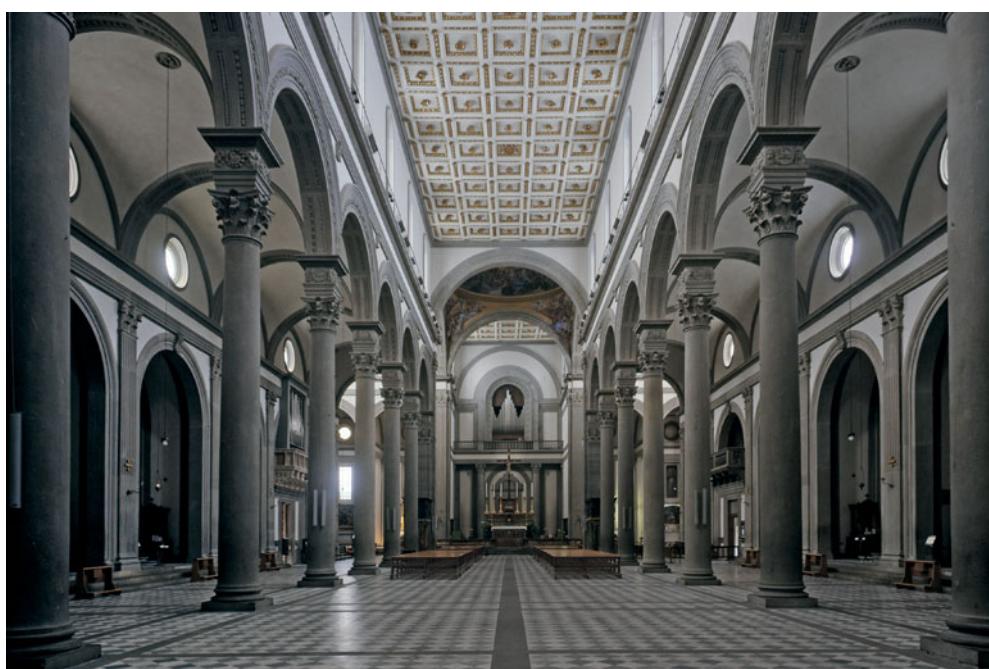
Other commissions came quickly after the cathedral dome project established Brunelleschi’s fame. From about 1418 until

his death in 1446, Brunelleschi was involved in a series of influential projects. In 1419, he designed a foundling hospital for the city (see “The Foundling Hospital,” page 600). Between 1419 and 1423, he built the elegant Capponi Chapel in the church of Santa Felicità (see FIG. 21-29). For the Medicis’ parish church of San Lorenzo, he designed and built a centrally planned sacristy (a room where ritual attire and vessels are kept), from 1421 to 1428, and also conceived plans for a new church.

Brunelleschi’s **SAN LORENZO** has a basilican plan with a long nave flanked by side aisles that open into shallow lateral chapels (FIG. 20-4). A short transept and square crossing lead to a square sanctuary flanked by additional chapels opening off the transept. Brunelleschi based his mathematically regular plan on a square module—a basic unit of measure that could be multiplied or



20-4 • Filippo Brunelleschi (continued by Michelozzo di Bartolomeo) INTERIOR (A) AND PLAN (B) OF CHURCH OF SAN LORENZO, FLORENCE
c. 1421–1428; nave (designed 1434?)
1442–1470.



A BROADER LOOK | The Foundling Hospital

In 1419, the guild of silk manufacturers and goldsmiths (Arte della Seta) in Florence undertook a significant public service: It established a large public orphanage and commissioned the brilliant young architect Filippo Brunelleschi to build it near the church of the Santissima Annunziata (Most Holy Annunciation), which housed a miracle-working painting of the Annunciation, making it a popular pilgrimage site. Completed in 1444, the Foundling Hospital—**OSPEDALE DEGLI INNOCENTI**—was unprecedented in terms of scale and design (FIG. 20-5).

Brunelleschi created a building that paid homage to traditional forms while introducing features that we associate with the Italian Renaissance style. Traditionally, a charitable foundation's building had a portico open to the street to provide shelter, and Brunelleschi built an arcade of striking lightness and elegance,

using smooth round columns and richly carved capitals—his own interpretation of the Classical Corinthian order. Although we might initially assume that the sources for this arcade lay in the Roman architecture of Classical antiquity, columns were not actually used in antiquity to support free-standing arcades, only to support straight architraves. In fact, it was local Romanesque architecture that was the source for Brunelleschi's graceful design. It is the details of capitals and moldings that bring an air of the antique to this influential building.

The underlying mathematical basis for Brunelleschi's design—traced to the same Pythagorean proportional systems that were believed to create musical harmony—creates a distinct sense of harmony in this graceful arcade. Each bay encloses a cube of space defined by the 10-*braccia* (20-foot) height of the columns and the diameter of the arches.

Domical vaults, half again as high as the columns, cover the cubes. The bays at the end of the arcade are slightly larger than the rest, creating a subtle frame for the composition. Brunelleschi defined the perfect squares and semicircles of his building with dark gray stone (*pietra serena*) against plain white walls. His training as a goldsmith and sculptor (see “The Competition Reliefs,” page 603) served him well as he led his artisans to carve crisp, elegantly detailed capitals and moldings for the covered gallery.

A later addition to the building seems eminently suitable: About 1487, Andrea della Robbia, who had inherited the family ceramics firm and its secret **glazing** formulas from his uncle Luca, created for the spandrels between the arches glazed terra-cotta medallions (FIG. 20-6) that signified the building's function. Molds were used in the ceramic workshop to facilitate the production of the series of similar



babies in swaddling clothes that float at the center of each medallion. The molded terra-cotta forms were covered with a tin glaze to make the sculptures both weatherproof and decorative, and the baby-blue ceramic backgrounds—a signature color for the della Robbia family workshop—makes them seem to float as celestial apparitions. This is not altogether inappropriate. Although they clearly refer to the foundlings (*innocenti*) cared for in the hospital, they are also meant to evoke the “innocent” baby boys martyred by King Herod in his attempt to rid his realm of the potential rival the Magi had journeyed to venerate (Matthew 2:16).

Andrea della Robbia’s adorable ceramic babies—which remain among the most beloved images of the city of Florence—seem to lay claim to the human side of Renaissance humanism, reminding viewers that the city’s wealthiest guild cared for the most helpless members of society. Perhaps the Foundling Hospital spoke to fifteenth-century Florentines of an increased sense of social responsibility. Or perhaps, by so publicly demonstrating social concerns, the wealthy guild that sponsored it solicited the approval and support of the lower classes in the cut-throat power politics of the day.



20-5 • Filippo Brunelleschi OSPEDALE DEGLI INNOCENTI (FOUNDLING HOSPITAL), FLORENCE

Designed 1419; begun under Brunelleschi’s direct supervision 1421–1427; construction continued into the 1440s.

20-6 • Andrea della Robbia INFANT IN SWADDLING CLOTHES (ONE OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS MASSACRED BY HEROD)

Ospedale degli Innocenti (Foundling Hospital), Florence. 1487. Glazed terra cotta.





20-7 • Attributed to Michelozzo di Bartolomeo FAÇADE, PALAZZO MEDICI-RICCARDO, FLORENCE

Begun 1446 (the view shown here includes a two-bay extension constructed during the 18th century).

For the palace site, Cosimo de' Medici the Elder chose the Via de' Gori at the corner of the Via Larga, the widest city street at that time. Despite his practical reasons for constructing a large residence and the fact that he chose simplicity and austerity over grandeur in the exterior design, his detractors commented and gossiped. As one exaggerated, “[Cosimo] has begun a palace which throws even the Colosseum at Rome into the shade.”

divided and applied to every element of the design, creating a series of clear, harmonious spaces. Architectural details, all in a Classical style, were carved in *pietra serena*, a gray Tuscan sandstone that became synonymous with Brunelleschi's interiors. Below the plain clerestory with its unobtrusive openings, the arches of the nave arcade are carried on tall, slender Corinthian columns made even taller by the insertion of an impost block between the column capital and the springing of the round arches—one of Brunelleschi's favorite details. Flattened architectural moldings in *pietra serena* repeat the arcade in the outer walls of the side aisles, and each bay is covered by its own shallow domical vault. Brunelleschi's rational approach, clear sense of order, and innovative incorporation of Classical motifs inspired later Renaissance architects, many of whom learned from his work firsthand by completing his unfinished projects.

THE MEDICI PALACE Brunelleschi may have been involved in designing the nearby Medici Palace (now known as the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi) in 1446. According to Giorgio Vasari, the sixteenth-century artist and theorist who wrote the first modern history of art, Cosimo de' Medici the Elder rejected Brunelleschi's model for the **palazzo** as too grand (any large house was called a *palazzo*—“palace”). Many now attribute the design of the building to Michelozzo. The austere exterior (FIG. 20-7) was in keeping with the Florentine political climate and concurrent religious attitudes, imbued with the Franciscan ideals of poverty and charity. Like many other European cities, Florence had sumptuary laws, which forbade ostentatious displays of wealth—but they were often ignored. For example, private homes were supposed to be limited to a dozen rooms, but Cosimo acquired and demolished 20 small houses to provide the site for his new residence. His house was more than a dwelling place; it was his place of business, his company headquarters. The palazzo symbolized the family and established its proper place in the Florentine social hierarchy.

Huge in scale—each story is more than 20 feet high—the building is marked by harmonious proportions and elegant, Classically inspired details. On one side, the ground floor originally opened through large, round arches onto the street, creating in effect a loggia that provided space for the family business. These arches were walled up in the sixteenth century and given windows designed by Michelangelo. The large, **rusticated** stone blocks—that is, blocks with their outer faces left rough—facing the lower story clearly set it off from the upper two levels. In fact, all three stories are distinguished by stone surfaces that vary from sculptural at the ground level to almost smooth dressed stone on the third floor.

The builders followed the time-honored tradition of placing rooms around a central courtyard. Unlike the plan of the house of Jacques Coeur (see FIG. 19-24), however, the **PALAZZO MEDICI-RICCARDO COURTYARD** is square in plan with rooms arranged symmetrically (FIG. 20-8). Round arches on slender columns form a continuous arcade under an enclosed second story. Disks



20-8 • COURTYARD WITH SGRAFFITO DECORATION, PALAZZO MEDICI-RICCARDO, FLORENCE
Begun 1446.

In 1401, the building supervisors of the baptistery of Florence Cathedral decided to commission a new pair of bronze doors, funded by the powerful wool merchants' guild. Instead of choosing a well-established sculptor with a strong reputation, a competition was announced for the commission. This prestigious project would be awarded to the artist who demonstrated the greatest talent and skill in executing a trial piece: a bronze relief representing Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1–13) composed within the same Gothic quatrefoil framework used in Andrea Pisano's first set of bronze doors for the baptistery, made in the 1330s (see FIG. 18–3). The narrative subject was full of dramatic potential. Abraham, commanded by God to slay his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering, has traveled to the mountains for the sacrifice. Just as he is about to slaughter Isaac, an angel appears, commanding him to save his son and substitute a ram tangled in the bushes behind him.

Two competition panels have survived, those submitted by the presumed finalists—Filippo Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti, both young artists in their early twenties. Brunelleschi's composition (FIG. 20–9) is rugged and explosive, marked by raw dramatic intensity. At the right, Abraham lunges forward, grabbing his son by the neck, while the angel swoops energetically to stay his hand just as the knife is about to strike. Isaac's awkward pose embodies his fear and struggle. Ghiberti's version (FIG. 20–10) is quite different, suave and graceful rather than

powerful and dramatic. Poses are controlled and choreographed; the harmonious pairing of son and father contrasts sharply with the wrenching struggle in Brunelleschi's rendering. And Ghiberti's Isaac is not a stretched, scrawny youth, but a fully idealized Classical figure exuding calm composure.

Brunelleschi's biographer, Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, claimed that the competition ended in a tie, and that when the committee decided to split the commission between the two young artists, Brunelleschi withdrew. It is possible, however, that the cloth merchants actually chose Ghiberti to make the doors. They might have preferred the suave elegance of his figural composition. Perhaps they liked the prominence of elegantly disposed swags of cloth, reminders of the source of their patronage and prosperity. But they also could have been swayed by the technical superiority of Ghiberti's relief. Unlike Brunelleschi, Ghiberti cast background and figures mostly as a single piece, making his bronze stronger, lighter, and less expensive to produce. The finished doors—installed in the baptistery in 1424—were so successful that Ghiberti was commissioned to create another set (see FIG. 20–16), his most famous work, hailed by Michelangelo as the "Gates of Paradise." Brunelleschi would refocus his career on buildings rather than bronzes, becoming one of the most important architects of the Italian Renaissance (see FIGS. 20–2, 20–3, 20–4, 20–5).



20–9 • Filippo Brunelleschi **SACRIFICE OF ISAAC**
1401–1402. Bronze with gilding, 21" × 17½" (53 × 44 cm) inside
molding. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.



20–10 • Lorenzo Ghiberti **SACRIFICE OF ISAAC**
1401–1402. Bronze with gilding, 21" × 17½" (53 × 44 cm) inside
molding. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

bearing the Medici arms surmount each arch in a frieze decorated with swags in **sgraffito** work (decoration produced by scratching through a darker layer of plaster or glaze). Such classicizing elements, inspired by the study of Roman ruins, gave the great house an aura of dignity and stability that enhanced the status of its owners. The Medici Palace inaugurated a new fashion for monumentality and regularity in residential Florentine architecture. Wealthy Florentine families soon emulated it in their own houses.

SCULPTURE

The new architectural language inspired by ancient Classical forms was accompanied by a similar impetus in sculpture. By 1400, Florence had enjoyed internal stability and economic prosperity for

over two decades. However, until 1428, the city and its independence were challenged by two great anti-republican powers: the duchy of Milan and the kingdom of Naples. In an atmosphere of wealth and civic patriotism, Florentines turned to commissions that would express their self-esteem and magnify the importance of their city. A new attitude toward realism, space, and the Classical past set the stage for more than a century of creativity. Sculptors led the way.

ORSANMICHELE In 1339, 14 of Florence's most powerful guilds had been commissioned to fill the ground-floor niches that decorated the exterior of **ORSANMICHELE**—a newly completed loggia that served as a grain market—with sculpted images of their patron saints (FIG. 20-11). By 1400, only three had fulfilled this assignment. In the new climate of republicanism and civic pride, the government pressured the guilds to furnish their niches with statuary. In the wake of this directive, Florence witnessed a dazzling display of sculpture produced by the most impressive local practitioners, including Nanni di Banco, Lorenzo Ghiberti, and Donatello, each of whom took responsibility for filling three niches.

In about 1409, Nanni di Banco (c. 1385–1421), son of a sculptor in the Florence Cathedral workshop, was commissioned by the stonecarvers' and woodworkers' guild (to which he himself belonged) to produce **THE FOUR CROWNED MARTYRS** (FIG. 20-12). According to tradition, these third- or fourth-century Christian martyrs were sculptors, executed for refusing to make an image of a pagan Roman god for Emperor Diocletian. Although the architectural setting is Gothic in style, Nanni's figures—with their solid bodies, heavy, form-revealing togas, noble hair and beards, and portraiture features—reveal his interest in ancient Roman sculpture, particularly portraiture (see FIG. 6-22). They stand as a testimony to this sculptor's role in the Florentine revival of interest in antiquity.



20-11 • EXTERIOR VIEW OF ORSANMICHELE SHOWING SCULPTURE IN NICHES

Florence. Begun 1337.

At street level, Orsanmichele was constructed originally as an open loggia (similar to the Loggia dei Lanzi in FIG. 18-2); in 1380 the spaces under the arches were filled in. In this view of the southeast corner, appearing on the receding wall to the left is first (in the foreground on the corner pier) Donatello's *St. George*, then, Nanni di Banco's *Four Crowned Martyrs*. However, the sculptures seen in this photograph are modern replicas; the originals have been removed to museums for safekeeping.

The saints convey a new spatial relationship to the building and to the viewer. They stand in a semicircle, with feet and drapery protruding beyond the floor of the niche and into the viewer's space. The saints appear to be four

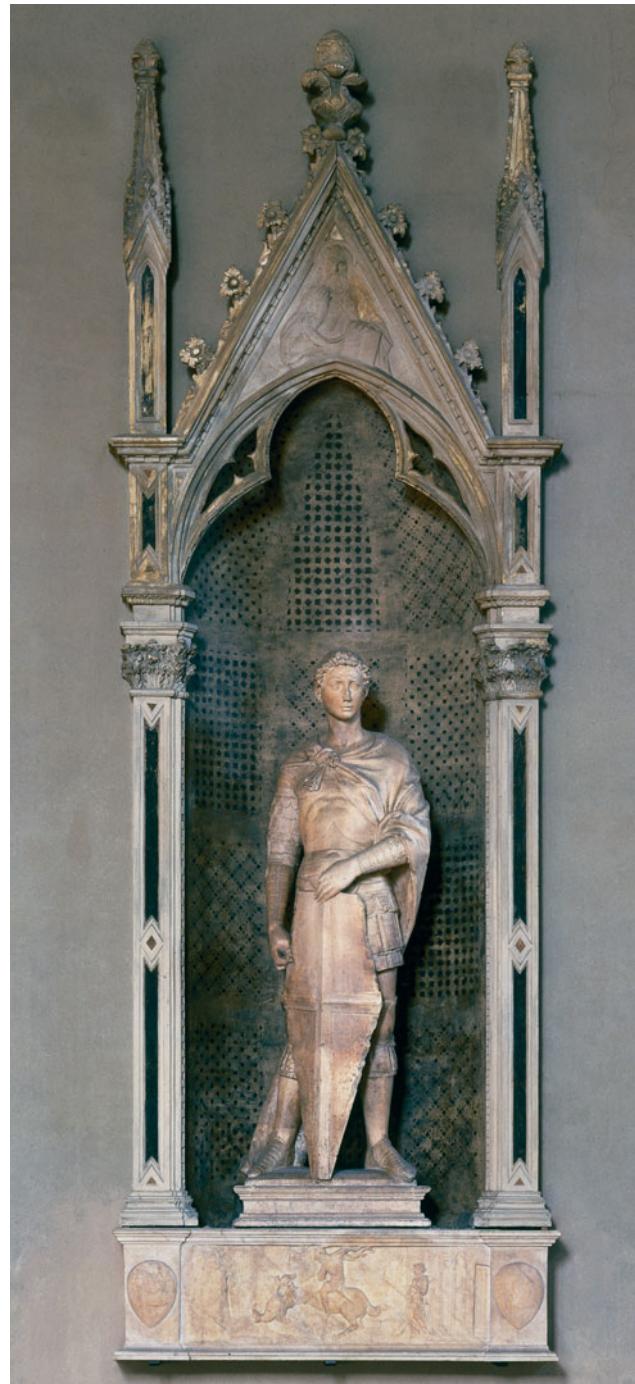
individuals interacting within their own world, but a world that opens to engage with passing pedestrians (see FIG. 20-11). The relief panel below the niche shows the four sculptors at work, embodied with a similar solid vigor. Nanni deeply undercut both figures and objects to cast shadows that enhance the illusion of three-dimensionality.

Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, c. 1386/1387–1466) also received three commissions for the niches at Orsanmichele during the first quarter of the century. Like Nanni, a member of the guild of stonecarvers and woodworkers, he worked



20-12 • Nanni di Banco THE FOUR CROWNED MARTYRS

c. 1409–1417. Marble, height of figures 6' (1.83 m). Photographed *in situ* before removal of the figures to the Museo di Orsanmichele, Florence.



20-13 • Donatello ST. GEORGE

Formerly in Orsanmichele, Florence. 1417–1420. Marble, height 6'5" (1.95 m). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

in both media, as well as in bronze. During a long and productive career, he developed into one of the most influential and distinguished figures in the history of Italian sculpture, approaching each commission as if it were the opportunity for a new experiment. One of Florence's lesser guilds—the armorers and swordmakers—called on Donatello to carve a majestic and self-assured **ST. GEORGE** for their niche (FIG. 20-13). As originally conceived, the saint would have been a standing advertisement for their trade,



20-14 • Donatello DAVID

c. 1446–1460(?). Bronze, height 5'2 1/4" (1.58 m). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

This sculpture is first recorded as being in the courtyard of the Medici Palace in 1469, where it stood on a base inscribed with these lines:

The victor is whoever defends the fatherland.

All-powerful God crushes the angry enemy.

Behold, a boy overcomes the great tyrant.

Conquer, O citizens!

carrying a metal sword in his right hand and probably wearing a metal helmet and sporting a scabbard, all now lost. The figure has remarkable presence, even without his accessories. St. George stands in solid contrapposto, legs braced to support his armor-heavy torso, the embodiment of alertness and courage. He seems to stare out into our world, perhaps surveying his most famous adversary—a dragon that was holding a princess captive—lurking unsettlingly in the space behind us. With his wrinkled brow and determined expression, he is tense, alert, focused, if perhaps also slightly worried. Donatello's complex psychological characterization of this warrior-saint particularly impressed Donatello's contemporaries, not least among them his potential patrons.

For the base of the niche, Donatello carved a remarkable shallow relief showing St. George slaying the dragon and saving the princess, a well-known part of his story. The contours of the foreground figures are slightly undercut to emphasize their mass, while the landscape and architecture are in progressively lower relief until they are barely incised rather than carved, an ingenious emulation of the painters' technique of atmospheric perspective. This is also a pioneering example of linear perspective (see “Renaissance Perspective,” page 610), in which the orthogonals converge on the figure of the saint himself, using this burgeoning representational system not only to simulate spatial recession but also to provide narrative focus.

DONATELLO Donatello's long career as a sculptor in a broad variety of media established him as one of the most successful and admired sculptors of the Italian Renaissance. He excelled in part because of his attentive exploration of human emotions and expression, as well as his ability to solve the technical problems posed by various media—from lost-wax casting in bronze and carved marble to polychromed wood. In a bronze **DAVID**, he produced the first life-size, free-standing nude since antiquity (FIG. 20-14), and in his portrait of the soldier Erasmo da Narni, one of the first life-size bronze equestrian portraits of the Renaissance (see FIG. 20-15).

Since nothing is known about the circumstances of its creation, the *David* has been the subject of continuing inquiry and speculation. Although the statue clearly draws on the Classical tradition of heroic nudity, the meaning of this sensuous, pre-pubescent boy in a jaunty laurel-trimmed shepherd's hat and boots has long piqued interest. Some art historians have stressed an overt homoeroticism, especially in the openly effeminate conception of David and the way a wing from the helmet on Goliath's severed head caresses the young hero's inner thigh. Others have seen in David's angular pose and boyish torso a sense that he is poised between childish interests and adult responsibility, an image of improbable heroism. David was a potent political image in Florence, a symbol of the citizens' resolve to oppose tyrants regardless of their superior power, since virtue brings divine support and preternatural strength, and we will see other Florentine Renaissance renderings of this biblical hero. Indeed, an inscription engraved into the base where the sculpture

 **Watch** a video about the process of lost-wax casting on myartslab.com

once stood suggests that it could have celebrated the Florentine triumph over the Milanese in 1425, a victory that brought resolution to a quarter-century struggle with despots and helped give Florence a vision of itself as a strong, virtuous republic.

In 1443, Donatello was probably called to Padua to execute an **EQUESTRIAN STATUE** (FIG. 20-15) to commemorate the Paduan general of the Venetian army, Erasmo da Narni, nicknamed “Gattamelata” (meaning “Honeyed Cat”—a reference to his mother, Melania Gattelli). If any image could be said to characterize the self-made men of the Italian Renaissance, surely it would be those of the *condottieri*—the brilliant generals such as Gattamelata and Niccolò da Tolentino (see FIG. 20-1) who organized the armies and fought for any city-state willing to pay for their services. As guardians for hire, they were tough, opportunistic mercenaries. But they also subscribed to an ideal of military and civic virtue.

Horsemanship was more than a necessary skill for the *condottieri*. The horse, a beast of enormous brute strength, symbolized animal passions, and skilled horsemanship demonstrated physical and intellectual control—self-control, as well as control of the animal—the triumph of the intellect, of “mind over matter.”

Donatello’s sources for this statue were surviving Roman bronze equestrian portraits, notably the famous image of Marcus Aurelius (see FIG. 6-57), which the sculptor certainly knew from his stay in Rome, as well as the famous set of Roman bronze horses installed on the façade of St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice. Viewed from a distance, Donatello’s man-animal juggernaut, installed on a high marble base in front of the church of Sant’Antonio in Padua, seems capable of thrusting forward at the first threat. Seen up close, however, the man’s sunken cheeks, sagging jaw, ropy neck, and stern but sad expression suggest a warrior grown old and tired from the constant need for military vigilance and rapid response.



THE GATES OF PARADISE The bronze doors that Lorenzo Ghiberti (1381?–1455) produced for the Florentine Baptistery after winning his famous competition with Brunelleschi in 1401 (see “The Competition Reliefs,” page 603) were such a success that in 1425 he was awarded the commission for yet another set of bronze doors for the east side of the Baptistery, facing the doors of the cathedral; his first set of doors was moved to the north side. The new door panels, funded by the wool manufacturers’ guild, were a significant conceptual leap from the older schemes of 28 small scenes employed for Ghiberti’s earlier doors and those of Andrea Pisano in the fourteenth century (see FIG. 18-3). Ghiberti departed entirely from the old arrangement, producing a set of ten scenes from the Hebrew Bible—from the Creation

20-15 • Donatello EQUESTRIAN STATUE OF ERASMO DA NARNI (GATTAMELATA)

Piazza del Santo, Padua. 1443–1453. Bronze, height approx. 12' 2" (3.71 m).



to the reign of Solomon—composed in rectangular fields, like a set of framed paintings. Michelangelo reportedly said that the results, installed in 1452, were worthy of the “**GATES OF PARADISE**”—the name by which they are now commonly known (FIG. 20-16).

Ghiberti organized the space in the ten square reliefs either by a system of linear perspective with obvious orthogonal lines (see “Renaissance Perspective,” page 610) or more intuitively by a series of arches or rocks or trees charting the path into the distance. Foreground figures are grouped in the lower third of each panel, while the other figures decrease gradually in size to map their positioning in deep space. The use of a system of perspective, with clearly differentiated background and foreground, also helped Ghiberti combine a series of related events, separated by narrative time, within a single pictorial frame.

The story of **JACOB AND ESAU** (Genesis 25 and 27) fills the center panel of the left door. Ghiberti creates a coherent and measurable space peopled by graceful, idealized figures (FIG. 20-17). He pays careful attention to one-point perspective in laying out the architectural setting. Squares in the pavement establish the receding lines of the orthogonals that seem to converge on a central vanishing point under the loggia, while towering arches overlap and gradually diminish in size from foreground to background to define the receding space above the figures. The story unfolds in a series of individual episodes and begins in the background. On the rooftop (upper right) Rebecca stands, listening as God warns of her unborn sons’ future conflict; under the left-hand arch she gives birth to the twins. The adult Esau sells his rights as oldest son to his brother Jacob, and when he goes hunting (center right), Rebecca and Jacob plot against him. Finally, in the right foreground, Jacob receives Isaac’s blessing, while in the center, Esau faces his father. Ghiberti’s portrayal of the scene relates more closely to developments in painting than to contemporary sculpture. Ghiberti not only signed his work, but also included his self-portrait in the medallion beside the lower right-hand corner of this panel.



20-17 • Lorenzo Ghiberti JACOB AND ESAU, PANEL OF THE “GATES OF PARADISE” (EAST BAPTISTERY DOORS)
Formerly on the Baptistry of San Giovanni, Florence. c. 1435. Gilded bronze, 31 1/4" (79 cm) square. Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence.

PAINTING

Wealthy patrons commissioned murals and large altarpieces for their local churches and smaller panel paintings for their houses and private chapels. Artists experienced in fresco were in great demand and traveled widely to execute wall and ceiling decorations. At first the Italians showed little interest in oil painting, for the most part using tempera even for their largest works. But, in the last decades of the century, oil painting became popular in Venice.

MASACCIO Even though his brief career lasted less than a decade, Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Mone Cassai (1401–1428/1429?), nicknamed “Masaccio” (meaning “Big Tom”), established a new direction in Florentine painting, much as Giotto had a century earlier. He did this by integrating monumental and consistently scaled figures into rational architectural and natural settings using linear perspective. The chronology of Massaccio’s works is uncertain, but his fresco of the **TRINITY** in the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence must have been painted around 1426, the date on the Lenzi family tombstone that once stood in front of it (FIGS. 20-19, 20-20).

Masaccio’s fresco was meant to give the illusion of a stone funerary monument and altar table set below a deep **edicula** (framed niche) in the wall. The effect of looking up into a barrel-vaulted niche was made plausible through precisely rendered linear perspective. The eye level of an adult male viewer standing within

20-16 • Lorenzo Ghiberti “GATES OF PARADISE” (EAST BAPTISTERY DOORS)

Formerly on the Baptistry of San Giovanni, Florence. 1425–1452. Gilt bronze, height 15' (4.57 m). Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence.

The door panels, commissioned by the wool manufacturers’ guild, depict ten scenes from the Hebrew Bible beginning with the Creation in the upper left panel. The murder of Abel by his brother, Cain, follows in the upper right panel, succeeded in the same left-right paired order by the Flood and the drunkenness of Noah, Abraham sacrificing Isaac, the story of Jacob and Esau, Joseph sold into slavery by his brothers, Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law, Joshua and the fall of Jericho, David and Goliath, and finally Solomon and the queen of Sheba. Ghiberti placed his own portrait as a signature in the frame at the lower right corner of the Jacob and Esau panel. He wrote in his *Commentaries* (c. 1450–1455): “I strove to imitate nature as clearly as I could, and with all the perspective I could produce, to have excellent compositions with many figures.”

TECHNIQUE | Renaissance Perspective

Fifteenth-century Italian artists developed a system known as linear, or mathematical perspective that enabled them to represent three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface, simulating the recession of space in the visible world pictorially in a way they found convincing. The sculptor and architect Filippo Brunelleschi first demonstrated the system about 1420, and the theorist and architect Leon Battista Alberti codified it in 1436 in his treatise *Della Pittura (On Painting)*.

For Alberti, in one-point linear perspective a picture's surface was conceived as a flat plane that intersected the viewer's field of vision at right angles. This highly artificial concept presumed a viewer standing dead center at a prescribed distance from a work of art. From this single fixed vantage point, everything would appear to recede into the distance at the same rate, following imaginary lines called orthogonals that met at a single **vanishing point** on the horizon. By using orthogonals in

concert with controlled diminution of scale as forms move back toward the vanishing point, artists could replicate the optical illusion that things appear to grow smaller, rise higher, and come closer together as they get farther away from us. Linear perspective makes pictorial spaces seem almost like extensions of the viewer's real space, creating a compelling, even exaggerated sense of depth (FIG. 20-18).

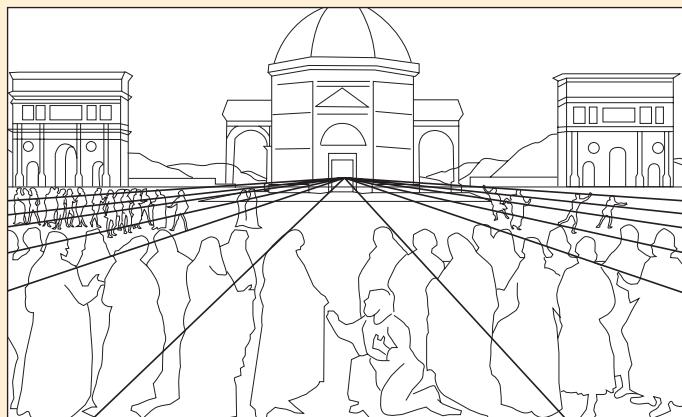
Linear perspective is not the only way to simulate spatial recession in two-dimensional painting (See “Pictorial Devices for Depicting Recession in Space,” page xxiii). In atmospheric perspective, for example, variations in color and clarity convey the feeling of distance when objects and landscape are portrayed less clearly, and colors become grayer, in the background, imitating the natural effects of a loss of clarity and color when viewing things in the distance through an atmospheric haze.



20-18 • Perugino CHRIST GIVING THE KEYS TO ST. PETER, WITH A SCHEMATIC DRAWING SHOWING THE ORTHOGONALS AND VANISHING POINT

Fresco on the right wall of the Sistine Chapel (see FIG. 20-33), Vatican, Rome. 1481. 11'5½" × 18'8½" (3.48 × 5.70 m).

Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter is a remarkable study in linear perspective. The clear demarcation of the paving stones of the piazza provides a network of orthogonal and horizontal lines for the measured placement of the figures. People and buildings become increasingly, and logically, smaller as the space recedes. Horizontally, the composition is divided between the foreground frieze of figures and the widely spaced background buildings, vertically by the open space at the center between Christ and Peter and by the symmetrical architectural forms on either side of this central axis. Perugino's painting is, among other things, a representation of Alberti's ideal city, described in *De re aedificatoria* as having a “temple” (that is, a church) at the very center of a great open space raised on a dais and separate from any other buildings that might obstruct it.



the church determined the horizon line on which the vanishing point was centered, just below the kneeling figures above the altar. And the painting demonstrates not only Masaccio's intimate knowledge of Brunelleschi's perspective experiments (see “Renaissance Perspective,” above), but also his architectural style (see FIG.

20-4). The painted architecture is an unusual combination of Classical orders. On the wall surface, Corinthian pilasters support a plain architrave below a cornice, while inside the niche Renaissance variations on Ionic columns support framing arches at the front and rear of the barrel vault. The “source” of the consistent

20-19 • Masaccio TRINITY WITH THE VIRGIN, ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, AND DONORS

Church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence. c. 1425–1427/1428. Fresco, 21' × 10'5" (6.4 × 3.2 m).

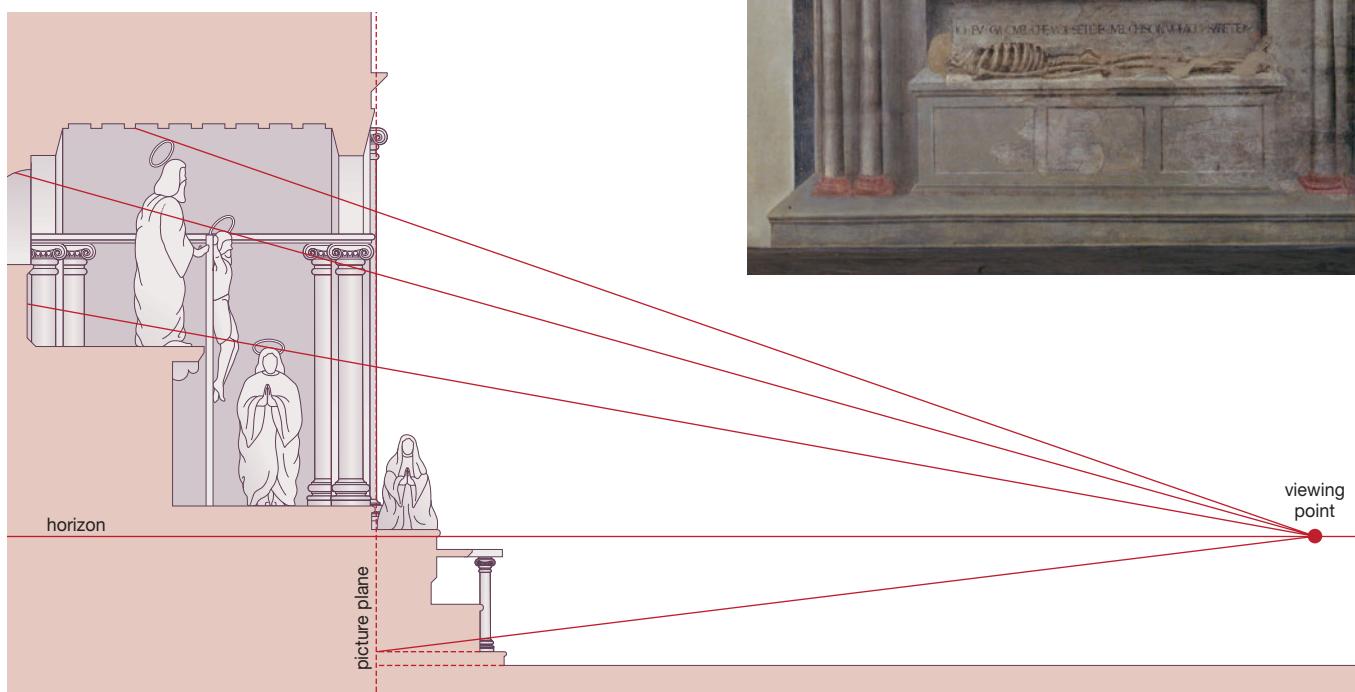
illumination of the architecture lies in front of the picture, casting reflections on the coffers, or sunken panels, of the ceiling.

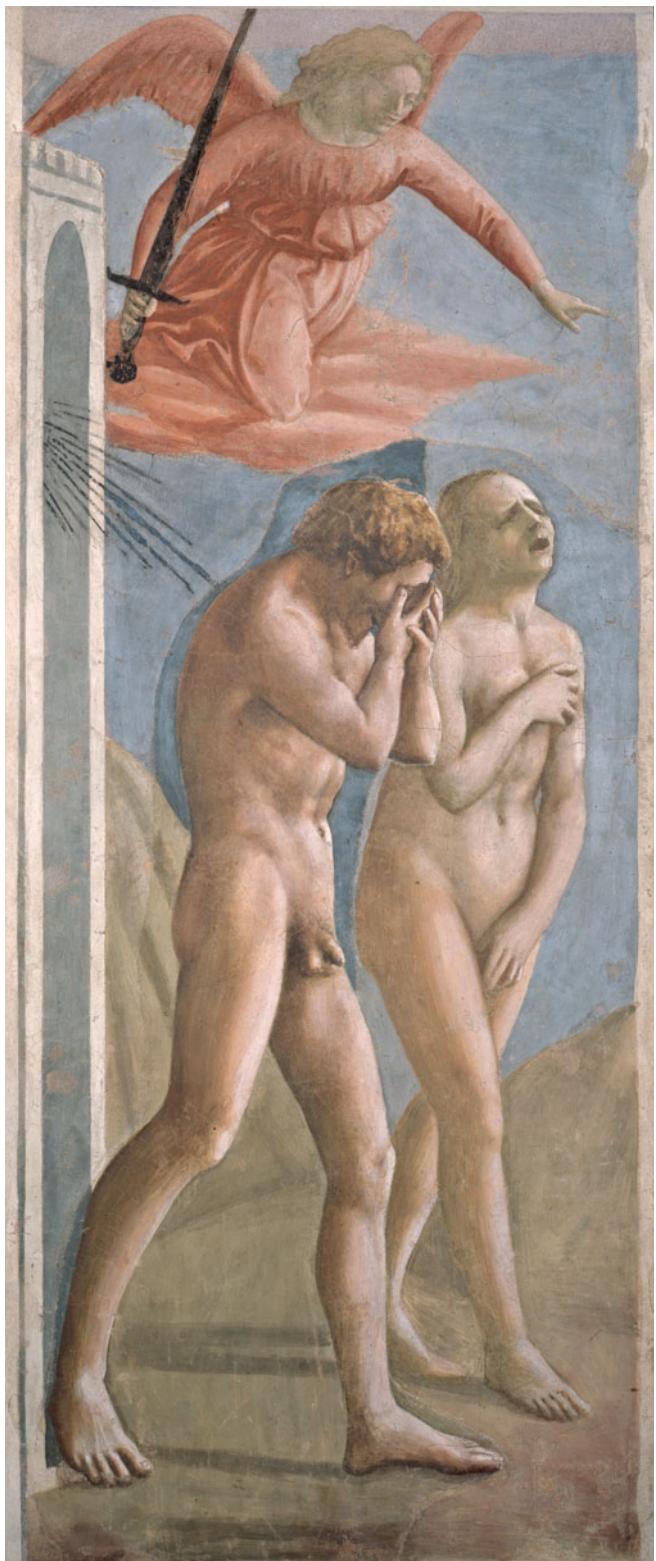
The figures are organized in a measured progression through space. At the near end of the recessed, barrel-vaulted space is the Trinity—Jesus on the cross, the dove of the Holy Spirit poised in downward flight above his tilted halo, and God the Father, who stands behind to support the cross from his elevated perch on a high platform. As in many scenes of the Crucifixion, Jesus is flanked by the Virgin Mary and John the Evangelist, who contemplate the scene on either side of the cross. Mary gazes calmly out at us, her raised hand drawing our attention to the Trinity. Members of the Lenzi family kneel in front of the pilasters—thus closer to us than the Crucifixion; the red robes of the male donor signify that he was a member of the governing council of Florence. Below these donors, in an open sarcophagus, is a skeleton, a grim reminder of the Christian belief that since death awaits us all, our only hope is redemption and the promise of life in the hereafter, rooted in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The inscription above the skeleton reads: "I was once that which you are, and what I am you also will be."



20-20 • SECTION DIAGRAM OF THE ILLUSIONISTIC SPATIAL WORLD PORTRAYED IN MASACCIO'S TRINITY

After Gene Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age*, Berkeley, 1998.





20-21 • Masaccio THE EXPULSION OF ADAM AND EVE FROM PARADISE

Brancacci Chapel, church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.
c. 1427. Fresco, 7' × 2'11" (214 × 90 cm).

Cleaning and restoration of the Brancacci Chapel paintings revealed the remarkable speed and skill with which Masaccio worked. He painted Adam and Eve in four *giornate* (each *giornata* of fresh plaster representing a day's work). Working from the top down and left to right, he painted the angel on the first day; on the second day, the portal; Adam on the third day; and Eve on the fourth.

THE BRANCACCI CHAPEL Masaccio's brief career culminated in the frescos he painted on the walls of the Brancacci Chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence. Reproduced here are two of the best-known scenes: **THE EXPULSION OF ADAM AND EVE FROM PARADISE** (FIG. 20-21) and **THE TRIBUTE MONEY** (FIG. 20-22). In *The Expulsion*, he presented Adam and Eve as monumental nude figures, combining his studies of the human figure with an intimate knowledge of ancient Roman sculpture. In contrast to Flemish painters, who sought to record every visible detail of a figure's surface (compare Adam and Eve from FIG. 19-15), Masaccio focused on the mass of the bodies formed by the underlying bone and muscle structure, and a single light source emphasizes their tangibility with modeled forms and cast shadows. Departing from earlier interpretations of the event that emphasized wrongdoing and the fall from grace, Masaccio concerns himself with the psychological impact of shame on these first humans, who have been cast out of paradise mourning and protesting, thrown naked into the world.

In *The Tribute Money* (see FIG. 20-22), Masaccio portrays an incident from the life of Jesus that highlights St. Peter (Matthew 17:24–27), to whom this chapel was dedicated. In the central scene a tax collector (dressed in a short red tunic and seen from behind) asks Peter (in the left foreground with the short gray beard) if Jesus pays the Jewish temple tax (the “tribute money” of the title). Set against the stable backdrop of a semicircular block of apostolic observers, a masterful series of dynamic diagonals in the postures and gestures of the three main figures interlocks them in a compositional system that imbues their interaction with a sense of tension calling out for resolution. Jesus instructs Peter to “go to the sea, drop in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up,” which Peter does at the far left. In the fish’s mouth is a coin, which Peter gives to the tax collector at the far right. The tribute story was especially significant for Florentines because in 1427, to raise money for defense against military aggression, the city enacted a graduated tax, based on the value of people’s personal property.

The Tribute Money is particularly remarkable for its early use of both linear and atmospheric perspective to integrate figures, architecture, and landscape into a consistent whole. Jesus, and the apostles surrounding him, form a clear central focus, from which the landscape seems to recede naturally into the far distance. To foster this illusion, Masaccio used linear perspective in the depiction of the house, and then reinforced it by diminishing the sizes of the distant barren trees and reducing the size of the crouching Peter at far left. The central vanishing point established by the orthogonals of the house corresponds with the head of Jesus.

The cleaning of the painting in the 1980s revealed that it was painted in 32 *giornate* (a *giornata* is a section of fresh plaster that could be prepared and painted in a single day; see “*Buon Fresco*,” page 539). The cleaning also uncovered Masaccio’s subtle use of color to create atmospheric perspective in the distant landscape, where mountains fade from grayish-green to grayish-white and the houses and trees on their slopes are loosely sketched to simulate



20-22 • Masaccio THE TRIBUTE MONEY

Brancacci Chapel, church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence. c. 1427. Fresco, 8'1" × 19'7" (2.46 × 6 m).

 **View** the Closer Look for *The Tribute Money* on myartslab.com

the lack of clear definition when viewing things in the distance through a haze. Green leaves were painted on the branches *al secco* (meaning “on the dry plastered wall”).

As in *The Expulsion*, Masaccio modeled the foreground figures here with bold highlights and long shadows on the ground toward the left, giving a strong sense of volumetric solidity and implying a light source at the far right, as if the scene were lit by the actual window in the rear wall of the Brancacci Chapel. Not only does the lighting give the forms sculptural definition; the colors vary in tone according to the strength of the illumination. Masaccio used a wide range of hues—pale pink, mauve, gold, blue-green, seafoam-green, apple-green, peach—and a sophisticated shading technique using contrasting colors, as in Andrew’s green robe which is shaded with red instead of darker green. The figures of Jesus and the apostles originally had gold-leaf haloes, several of which have flaked off. Rather than silhouette the heads against consistently flat gold circles (e.g. see FIG. 18-12), however, Masaccio conceived of haloes as gold disks hovering in space above each head that moved with the heads as they moved, and he foreshortened them depending on the angle from which each head is seen.

Some stylistic innovations take time to be fully accepted, and Masaccio’s innovative depictions of volumetric solidity, consistent lighting, and spatial integration—though they clearly had an impact on his immediate successors—were perhaps best appreciated by a later generation of painters. Many important sixteenth-century Italian artists, including Michelangelo, studied and sketched Masaccio’s Brancacci Chapel frescos, as they did Giotto’s work in

the Scrovegni Chapel. In the meantime, painting in Florence after Masaccio’s death developed along somewhat different lines.

PAINTING IN FLORENCE AFTER MASACCIO

The tradition of covering walls with frescos continued uninterrupted through the fifteenth century. Between 1438 and 1445, Fra Angelico’s decoration of the Dominican monastery of San Marco in Florence was one of the most extensive projects.

FRA ANGELICO Guido di Piero da Mugello (c. 1395/1400–1455), earned his nickname “Fra Angelico” (“Angelic Brother”) through his piety as well as his painting: in 1984, he was beatified, the first step toward sainthood. Fra Angelico is first documented painting in Florence in 1417–1418, and he remained an active painter after taking vows as a Dominican monk in nearby Fiesole between 1418 and 1421.

Between 1438 and 1445, in the monastery of San Marco, Fra Angelico and his assistants—probably working under the patronage of Cosimo de’ Medici—created paintings to inspire meditation in each monk’s cell (44 in all; see FIGS. Intro-8, Intro-9), in the chapter house (meeting room), and even in the corridors (hallways). At the top of the stairs in the north corridor, where the monks passed frequently on their way to their individual cells, Fra Angelico painted a serene picture of the **ANNUNCIATION** (FIG. 20-23). To describe the quiet, measured space where the demure archangel greets the unassuming, youthful Mary, Fra Angelico used linear perspective with striking sensitivity, extending the monks’



**20-23 • Fra Angelico
ANNUNCIATION**

North dormitory corridor, monastery of San Marco, Florence. c. 1438-1445. Fresco, 7'1" x 10'6" (2.2 x 3.2 m).

The shadowed vault of the portico is supported by a wall on one side and by slender Ionic and Corinthian columns on the other, a new building technique used by Brunelleschi (see FIG. 20-5).

stairway and corridor outward into an imagined portico and garden beside the Virgin's home. The slender, graceful figures wear quietly flowing draperies and assume modest poses. Natural light falling from the left models their forms gently, casting an almost supernatural radiance over their faces and hands. This is a sacred vision rendered in a contemporary setting, welcoming the monks to the most intimate areas of the monastery and preparing them for their private meditations. The line of Latin text running along the bottom of the picture directs the monks, "As you revere this

figure of the intact Virgin while passing before it, beware lest you omit to say a Hail Mary."

UCCELLO At mid century, when Fra Angelico was still painting his radiant visions of Mary and Jesus in the monastery of San Marco, other artists explored different directions. Thoroughly conversant with the theories of Brunelleschi and Alberti, they had mastered the techniques (and tricks) of depicting figures in a constructed architectural space. Paolo Uccello devoted himself with



**20-24 • Paolo Uccello THE
BATTLE OF SAN ROMANO**

1438-1440. Tempera on wood panel, approx. 6' x 10'6" (1.82 x 3.2 m). National Gallery, London.



20-25 • Andrea del Castagno THE LAST SUPPER

Refectory, convent of Sant'Apollonia, Florence. 1447. Fresco, width approx. 16' × 32' (4.6 × 9.8 m).

Castagno worked quickly, completing this huge mural in at most 32 days.

special fervor to the study of linear perspective (FIG. 20-24; see also FIG. 20-1). In his biographies of Italian artists, Vasari described Uccello as a man so obsessed with the science of perspective that he neglected his painting, his family, and even his pet birds (his *uccelli*). According to Vasari, Uccello's wife complained that he sat up drawing all night and when she called to him to come to bed he would say, "Oh, what a sweet thing this perspective is!" (Vasari, trans. Bondanella and Bondanella, p. 83).

CASTAGNO Andrea del Castagno (c. 1417/19–1457) is best known for a fresco of **THE LAST SUPPER** painted for a convent of Benedictine nuns in 1447 (FIG. 20-25). The subject was often painted in monastic refectories (dining halls) to remind the monks or nuns of Christ's Last Supper with his first followers and encourage them to see their daily gatherings for meals almost as a sacramental act rooted in this biblical tradition. Here Castagno has not portrayed the scene in the biblical setting of an "upper room." Rather, the humble house of the original account has become a great palace with sumptuous marble revetment. The most brilliantly colored and wildly patterned marble panel frames the off-center heads of Christ and Judas to focus viewers on the most important part of the picture. Judas takes his traditional position on the viewer's side of the table, separated from the other apostles. Equally conventional is the seemingly sleeping figure of St. John, head collapsed onto the tabletop (John 13:23). The lines of floor tiles, ceiling rafters, and paneled walls draw viewers into the scene, notably the nuns who would have seen the painting as an extension of their own dining hall. At first, the lines

of the orthogonals seem perfectly logical, but close examination reveals that only the lines of the ceiling converge to a single point. Two windows light the painting's room from the direction of the actual refectory windows, further unifying the two spaces.

FRA FILIPPO LIPPI During the middle of the fifteenth century, portraiture comes into its own as a major artistic form in Italy, and among the most extraordinary—if enigmatic—examples is this **PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN AND MAN** (FIG. 20-27), an early work of Fra Filippo Lippi (c. 1406–1469). This painting is also the earliest surviving double portrait of the Italian Renaissance. Lippi grew up as an orphan in the Carmelite church where Masaccio had painted frescos in the Brancacci Chapel, and art historians have stressed the impact this work had on Lippi's development as an artist. But although he may have absorbed Masaccio's predilection for softly rounded forms situated in carefully mapped spaces, in Lippi's hands these artistic tools became the basis for pictures that often ask more questions than they answer, by stressing outline at the same time as form, and by creating complex and often confusing spatial systems.

The emphasis in this double portrait is squarely on the woman. She is spotlighted in the foreground, sharply profiled against a window that serves as an unsettling internal frame, not big enough to contain her. This window opens onto a vista, clearly a fragment of a larger world, but one that highlights an orthogonal to emphasize a spatial recession only partially revealed. The woman blocks most of this vista with her shining visage and sumptuous costume—notably its embroidered velvet, fur lining, and luminous

ART AND ITS CONTEXTS | The Morelli–Nerli Wedding Chests

The palazzos of wealthy Florentine families housed not only panels painted with portraits or Madonnas; they were also appointed with massive pieces of elaborate furniture. Constructed of richly carved wood that was gilded and often covered with paintings, these household objects were not a minor sideline, but a central feature of the fifteenth-century Florentine art world. Some of the most impressive surviving examples of Renaissance furniture are great chests—called **cassoni**—that were used to store clothing and other precious personal objects in a couple’s bedroom. They were frequently commissioned in pairs on the occasion of a wedding.

Marriages between members of wealthy Florentine families were not the result of romantic connections between two young people. They were political alliances and economic transactions that involved the transfer of capital and the exchange of gifts as displays of wealth. In preparation for such high-class marriages, husbands refurbished their living quarters in the family palazzo where they would bring a bride into the household. We have a detailed accounting of the extent of work, as well as the required expenditure, when 30-year-old Lorenzo di Matteo Morelli prepared his apartments for the arrival of his young bride, Vaggia di Tanai Nerli, after their marriage in 1472. His commissioning of a pair of *cassoni*—one for him and one for Vaggia—represented almost two-thirds of the entire cost of redecoration. Fortunately, the two chests still survive (FIG. 20-26). They are among the most important and best-preserved Renaissance *cassoni* that have come down to us, especially since they still maintain the original backboard—called a *spalliera*—that was produced concurrent with and hung on the wall directly behind the chests when they were placed in Lorenzo’s bedroom. The lion’s feet on which the chests now stand are modern additions, and the *spalliera* was originally hung as one continuous painting above both *cassoni*, not two separate panels mounted behind each lid as in the current configuration. Otherwise these chests give a strong sense of their original appearance.

Like most Renaissance *cassoni*, Lorenzo’s chest is painted with pictures drawn from stories that extol moral virtues, and reflect some of their values and glories on Lorenzo himself. The long painted scene on the front tells the story of ancient Roman hero Marcus Furius Camillus’ defeat of the Gauls as he

chases them out of Rome. On the *spalliera*, *trompe l’oeil* curtains part to reveal the scene of another Roman hero defending a bridge against insurmountable odds. Presumably Lorenzo wanted to be seen as a heroic descendant of such illustrious Romans—strong, brave, and triumphant. The scenes portrayed on Vaggia’s chest (like Lorenzo’s, identified by her coat of arms) challenge her to care for the children she is expected to produce and practice the virtues of temperance, prudence, and patience that were valued in Florentine patrician brides.

The Morelli–Nerli *cassoni* passed from Lorenzo to his son, and they remained in the Morelli family at least until 1680, maybe into the nineteenth century, when they first appeared together in the art market. Elaborate Renaissance furniture became coveted items in the homes of wealthy art collectors in late nineteenth-century Europe and America, where the new owners doubtless saw themselves as worthy successors to the wealthy and powerful merchants who had commissioned them at the height of the Italian Renaissance.



20-26 • Jacopo del Sellaio, Biagio d’Antonio (painters), and Zanobi di Domenico (woodworker) CASSONE MADE FOR THE MARRIAGE OF LORENZO DI MATTEO MORELLI AND VAGGIA DI TANAI NERLI (ONE OF A SET OF TWO)

1472. Tempera and gold on wood, chest 83½" × 75" × 30" (212 × 193 × 76.2 cm). The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London. (F.1947.LF.4)



20-27 • Fra Filippo Lippi PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN AND MAN (ANGIOLA DI BERNARDO SAPITI AND LORENZO DI RANIERI SCOLARI?)

c. 1435–1445. Tempera on wood panel, 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ " × 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (64.1 × 41.9 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Some art historians have seen in the sumptuousness of this woman's costume an indication that she is a newlywed, outfitted in the extravagant clothing and jewelry presented to her by her husband at the time of their marriage, especially since the pearls sewn with gold threads into the embroidery on her sleeve spell out the word *lealtà*, meaning "loyalty." Florentine law prevented a woman from wearing such ostentatious expressions of wealth—especially the jewelry—more than three years after her marriage.

pearls. There is no engagement with the viewer and little sense of likeness. And it is not at all clear where or to what she directs her attention, especially since the gaze of the man in the background does not meet hers. He is even more of a mystery. We see only a masklike sliver of his profile—capped by the red *berretta* that signals his high status—although the substantiality of his face is reinforced by the strong shadow it casts against the window casement through which he looks. Unlike the woman, who clasps her inert hands in front of her as if to highlight her rings, this man fidgets with his

fingers, perhaps to draw our attention to the heraldic device below him that may identify him as a member of the Scolari family. This could be a double portrait of Lorenzo di Ranieri Scolari and Angiola di Bernardo Sapiti, who married in 1436 and welcomed a son in 1444. But what does the painting say about them? Does it commemorate their marriage, celebrate the birth of their child, or memorialize one of their deaths? All have been proposed by art historians as an explanation for this innovative double portrait, but it remains a puzzle to be pondered. Could that pondering be the point of the picture?

ITALIAN ART IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

In the second half of the fifteenth century, the ideas and ideals of artists like Brunelleschi, Donatello, and Masaccio began to spread from Florence to the rest of Italy, as artists who had trained or worked in Florence traveled to other cities to work, carrying the style with them. Northern Italy embraced the new Classical ideas swiftly, especially in the ducal courts at Urbino and Mantua. Venice and Rome also emerged as innovative art centers in the last quarter of the century.

URBINO

Under Federico da Montefeltro, Urbino developed into a thriving artistic center. A new palace was under construction, and prominent architects and artists were brought into the court to make the new princely residence a showcase of ducal splendor.

THE PALACE AT URBINO Construction of the palace had been under way for about 20 years in 1468 when Federico hired Luciano Laurana (c. 1420/1425–1479) to direct the work. Among Laurana's major contributions to the palace were closing the courtyard with a fourth wing and redesigning the courtyard façades (FIG. 20-28). The result is a superbly rational solution to the problems created in courtyard design by the awkward juncture of the arcades at the four corners. The ground-level portico on each side has arches supported by columns, but piers embellished with pilasters bridge the corner angles. This arrangement avoided the awkward visual effect of two arches springing from a single column (see FIG. 20-8) and gave the corner a greater sense of stability. A variation of the composite capital (a Corinthian capital with added Ionic volutes) was used, perhaps for the first time, on the ground level. Corinthian pilasters flank the windows in the story above, forming divisions that repeat the bays of the portico. (The two low upper stories were added later.) The plain architrave was engraved with inscriptions lauding Federico's many virtues, added when the count became duke of Urbino in 1476.

The interior of the Urbino palace likewise reflected its patron's embrace of new Renaissance ideas and interest in Classical



**20-28 • Luciano Laurana
COURTYARD, DUCAL PALACE,
URBINO**

Courtyard c. 1467–1472; palace begun c. 1450.

antiquity, seen in carved marble fireplaces and window and door surrounds. In creating luxurious home furnishings and interior decorations for sophisticated clients such as Federico, Italian artists found freedom to experiment with new subjects, treatments, and techniques. Among these was the creation of remarkable **trompe l'oeil** (“fool-the-eye”) effects using scrupulously applied linear

perspective and foreshortening in **intarsia** (wood inlay) decoration. An extraordinary example is on the walls of Federico da Montefeltro’s **STUDIOLO**, or study, a room for private conversation and the owner’s collection of fine books and art objects (FIG. 20-29). The work, probably done by the architect and wood-worker Giuliano da Maiano (1432–1490), carries the date 1476.



**20-29 • Giuliano da
Maiano (?) STUDIOLO
OF FEDERICO DA
MONTEFELTRO**
Ducal palace, Urbino. 1476.
Intarsia, height 7'3" (2.21 m).

The elaborate scenes in the small room are created entirely of wood inlaid on flat surfaces. Each detail is rendered with convincing illusionism: pilasters, carved cupboards with latticed doors, niches with statues, paintings, and built-in tables. Prominent in the decorative scheme is the prudent and industrious squirrel, a

Renaissance symbol of the ideal ruler: in other words, of Federico da Montefeltro. A large “window” looks out onto an elegant marble loggia with a distant view of the countryside through its arches; and the shelves, cupboards, and tables are filled with all manner of fascinating things—scientific instruments, books, even the duke’s armor hanging like a suit in a closet.



20-30 • Piero della Francesca BAPTISM OF CHRIST

c. 1450. Tempera on wood panel, 66" x 45¾" (1.67 x 1.16 m). National Gallery, London.

The three angels standing in a cluster at left, partially overlapped by the foreground tree, have been interpreted as an emblem of concord—representing the rapprochement reached between the Roman and Byzantine Christian churches in 1439 at the Council of Florence. Another reference to this council has been seen in the exotic costumes of the figures in the far background. Since the accord reached at the council was very short-lived, this interpretation would move the date of the painting into the early 1440s rather than the 1450s.

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA Federico brought the artist Piero della Francesca (c. 1415–1492) to Urbino. Piero had worked in Florence in the 1430s before settling in his native Borgo San Sepolcro, a Tuscan hill town under papal control. He knew current art theory and art practice—including Brunelleschi’s system of spatial illusion and linear perspective, Masaccio’s powerful modeling of forms and atmospheric perspective, and Alberti’s theoretical treatises. Piero was one of the few practicing artists who also wrote his own books of theory. Not surprisingly, in his treatise on perspective he emphasized the geometry and the volumetric construction of forms and spaces that were so apparent in his own work.

These characteristic features of Piero’s painting are marvelously apparent in a serene image of the **BAPTISM OF CHRIST** that has become one of Piero’s signature works (FIG. 20-30). It was commissioned by the Graziani family, probably during the 1450s, for the priory of San Giovanni Battista in Borgo San Sepolcro. The central figure of Christ dominates the painting, standing in a shallow stream of glassy water under a tree of manicured regularity. Christ’s legs and the sleek tree trunk set up a series of emphatically upright forms, one of many formal relationships that reverberate both across the picture’s surface and into its carefully measured space. Feet and ankles rotate across the lower quarter of the painting, providing a clear and well-distributed sense of grounding for the figural composition, while the radically foreshortened dove (Holy Spirit), John’s baptismal dish, and the clouds create a rhythmic line of horizontals that adds stability above and creates a staccato rhythm that merges foreground and background on the painting’s surface. The mirrored profiles and gestures of the outside angel and the baptizing John provide an internal frame for the central action. Such carefully crafted formal



20-31 • Piero della Francesca BATTISTA SFORZA AND FEDERICO DA MONTEFELTRO
c. 1474. Oil on wood panel, each $18\frac{1}{2}'' \times 13''$ (47 \times 33 cm). Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Battista Sforza died in 1472 at age 26, shortly after the birth of her ninth child, a son who would one day be duke. We are told that Federico was disconsolate. Some arranged aristocratic marriage alliances blossomed into loving partnerships, and it seems that one such was memorialized in this double portrait.

correspondences infuse this picture with an air of beatific calm and peaceful stasis—a stillness suggesting that nothing will ever change, no one will ever move in this frozen moment within a story that, for Christian believers, actually changed everything.

Piero traveled widely—to Rome, to the Este court in Ferrara, and especially to Urbino. In about 1474, he painted the portraits of **FEDERICO DA MONTEFELTRO** and his recently deceased wife, **BATTISTA SFORZA** (FIG. 20-31). The small panels resemble Flemish painting in their detail and luminosity, their record of surfaces and textures, and their vast landscapes. But in traditional Italian fashion, figures are portrayed in strict profile, disengaged psychologically from the viewer. The profile format also allowed for an accurate recording of Federico's likeness without emphasizing two disfiguring scars—the loss of his right eye from a lance blow and his broken nose. His good left eye is shown, and the angular profile of his nose might easily be merely a distinctive family trait. Typically, Piero emphasized the underlying geometry of

the forms. Dressed in the most elegant fashion (Federico wears his red ducal robe and Battista's jewels are meticulously recorded), they are silhouetted against a panoramic landscape. These are the hills around Urbino, seemingly dissolving into infinity through an atmospheric perspective as subtle and luminous as in any Flemish panel painting. Piero used another northern European device in the harbor view just in front of Federico, where the water narrows into a river that leads us into the distant landscape (see FIG. 19-17). He would have had contact in Urbino with the Flemings who were also working there.

MANTUA

Ludovico Gonzaga, the marquis of Mantua, ruled a territory that lies on the north Italian plain between Venice and Milan. Like Federico, he made his fortune as a *condottiere*. Ludovico was schooled by humanist teachers and created a court where humanist ideas flourished in art as well as in literature.



20-32 • Andrea Mantegna TWO VIEWS OF THE CAMERA PICTA, DUCAL PALACE, MANTUA

1465–1474. Fresco, diameter of false oculus 8'9" (2.7 m); room 26'6" square (8 m square).



MANTEGNA Working at Ludovico's court was Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), a painter trained in Padua and profoundly influenced by the sculptor Donatello, who arrived in Padua in 1443 and worked there for a decade. Mantegna learned the Florentine system of linear perspective and pushed to their limits experiments in radically foreshortened forms and dramatic spatial recessions. He went to work for Ludovico Gonzaga in 1460, and he continued to work for the Gonzaga family for the rest of his life.

Perhaps his finest works are the frescos of the **CAMERA PICTA** (“Painted Room”), a tower chamber in Ludovico’s palace, which Mantegna decorated between 1465 and 1474 (FIG. 20-32). Around the walls the family—each member seemingly identified by a portrait likeness—receives in landscapes and in loggias the return of Ludovico’s son, Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga. On the domed ceiling, the artist painted a *tour de force* of radical perspective in a technique called *di sotto in sù* (“from below upwards”). The room appears to be open to a cloud-filled sky through a large oculus in a simulated marble- and mosaic-covered vault. On each side of a precariously balanced planter, four young women—one an African, outfitted in an exotic turban—peer over a marble balustrade into the room below, while a fourth looks dreamily upward. Joined by a large peacock, several putti play around the balustrade, three standing on the interior ledge of a cornice, unprotected by

the balustrade, toes projecting into space but seemingly oblivious to the danger of their perch. This ceiling began a long tradition of illusionistic ceiling painting that culminated in the extravagant and explosive ceilings of Baroque churches (see Chapter 23).

ROME

Rome’s development into a Renaissance center of the arts was greatly enhanced when Pope Sixtus IV called to the city in the early 1480s a group of young Florentine and Umbrian artists to decorate the walls of his newly built chapel (1479–1481), now named the **SISTINE CHAPEL** after him (FIG. 20-33). Botticelli and Ghirlandaio were among the most famous artists summoned to the chapel to paint, but many art historians believe that Perugino was the supervising artist in charge of the project.

PERUGINO Pietro Vannucci, called “Perugino” (c. 1445–1523), was originally from near the town of Perugia in Umbria (thus the nickname), and he worked for a while in Florence, but by 1479 he was in Rome. Two years later, he was working on the Sistine murals. One of his contributions, *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter* (foreground painting at lower right in FIG. 20-33; also FIG. 20-18), portrayed the event that provided biblical support for the supremacy of papal authority (Matthew 16:19). In a light-filled piazza in which banded paving stones provide a geometric



**20-33 • VIEW OF
THE SISTINE CHAPEL
SHOWING PAINTINGS
COMMISSIONED FOR
THE SIDE WALLS BY
POPE SIXTUS IV**

Vatican, Rome. At lower right, Perugino's *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter*, c. 1480–1482. 11'5½" × 18'8½" (3.48 × 5.70 m).

grid for perspectival recession, the figures stand like chess pieces on the squares, scaled to size according to their distance from the picture plane and modeled by a consistent light source from the upper left. Triumphal arches inspired by ancient Rome frame the church and focus attention on the center of the composition, where the vital key is being transferred. The carefully calibrated scene is softened by the subdued colors, the distant idealized landscape and cloudy skies, and the variety of the figures' positions.

FLORENCE

Florence remained a thriving artistic center throughout the fifteenth century. Sculptors continued to explore Classical themes and experiment with the representation of the human form. Florentine painting pursued a love of material opulence, an interest in describing the natural world, and a poetic, mystical spirit, motivated by the patronage of citizens who sought to advertise their wealth and prestige as well as by the religious fervor that arose at the very end of the century.



20-34 • Andrea del Verrocchio DAVID

Commissioned by Lorenzo de' Medici for the Medici Palace. c. 1470–1475. Bronze with gilded details, height $49\frac{5}{8}$ " (1.26 m). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

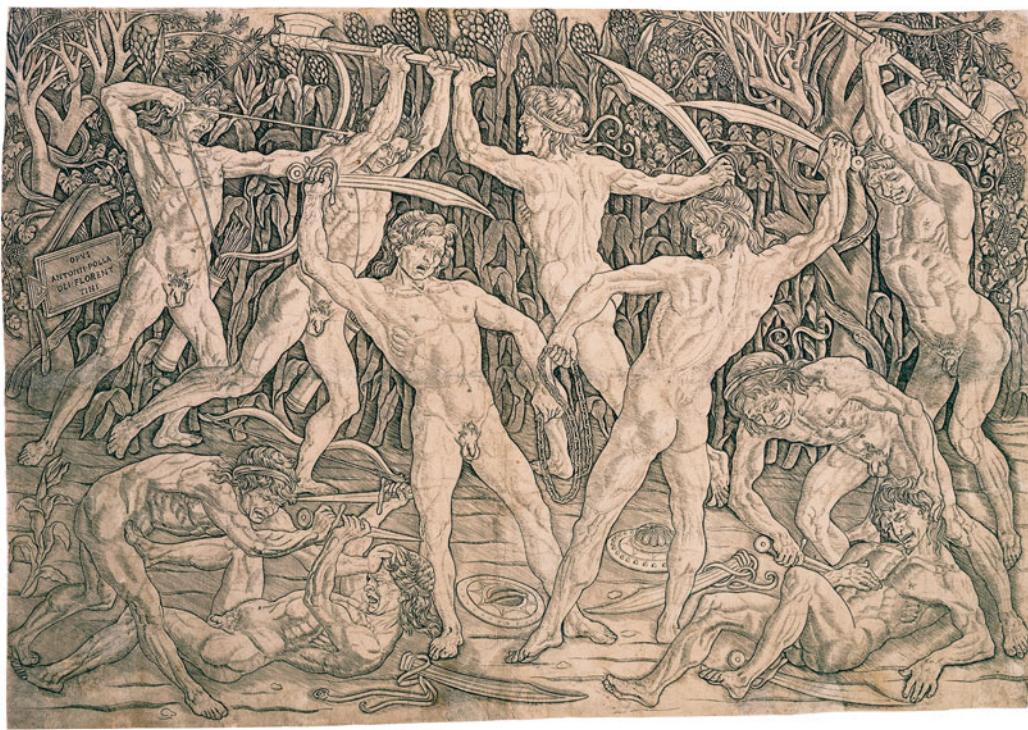
VERROCCHIO One of the most prestigious and active workshops in Florence was that of Andrea di Michele Cioni (1435–1488), nicknamed “Verrocchio” (“true eye”). Trained as a goldsmith, but best known for his works as a painter and bronze sculptor, Verrocchio was also a gifted teacher, counting among his pupils Perugino and Leonardo da Vinci. Around 1470, Lorenzo de' Medici commissioned from Verrocchio a bronze statue of David for the Palazzo Medici, the location where Donatello's sculpture of the same subject (see FIG. 20-14) was then displayed. Verrocchio's work (FIG. 20-34) seems to have been conceived as a response to the demure, sleek, but awkwardly boyish nude of his famous predecessor. Verrocchio's triumphant biblical hero is a poised and proud adolescent, modestly clothed and confidently looking out to meet the gaze of the viewer. Although slight, he is equipped with the developing musculature required for the

daunting task—whose accomplishment is signaled by the severed head of his foe, displayed like a trophy between his feet. The careful attention to the textural details of hair and clothing reveal Verrocchio's training as a goldsmith.

POLLAIUOLO Florentine sculptors not only created large-scale figures, but also small works designed to inspire the mind and delight the eye of its private owner. The ambitious and multi-talented Antonio del Pollaiuolo (c. 1431–1498)—goldsmith, embroidery designer, printmaker, sculptor, and painter—who came to work for the Medici family in Florence about 1460, created mostly small bronze sculptures. His **HERCULES AND ANTAEUS** of about 1475 is one of the largest (FIG. 20-35). This study of complex interlocking figures has an explosive energy that can best be appreciated by viewing it from every angle.



20-35 • Antonio del Pollaiuolo HERCULES AND ANTAEUS
c. 1475. Bronze, height with base 18" (45.7 cm). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.



20-36 • Antonio del Pollaiuolo
THE BATTLE OF THE NUDES
 c. 1465–1470. Engraving, $15\frac{1}{8}'' \times 23\frac{1}{4}''$ (38.3 × 59 cm). Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio. Bequest of Herbert Greer French. 1943.118

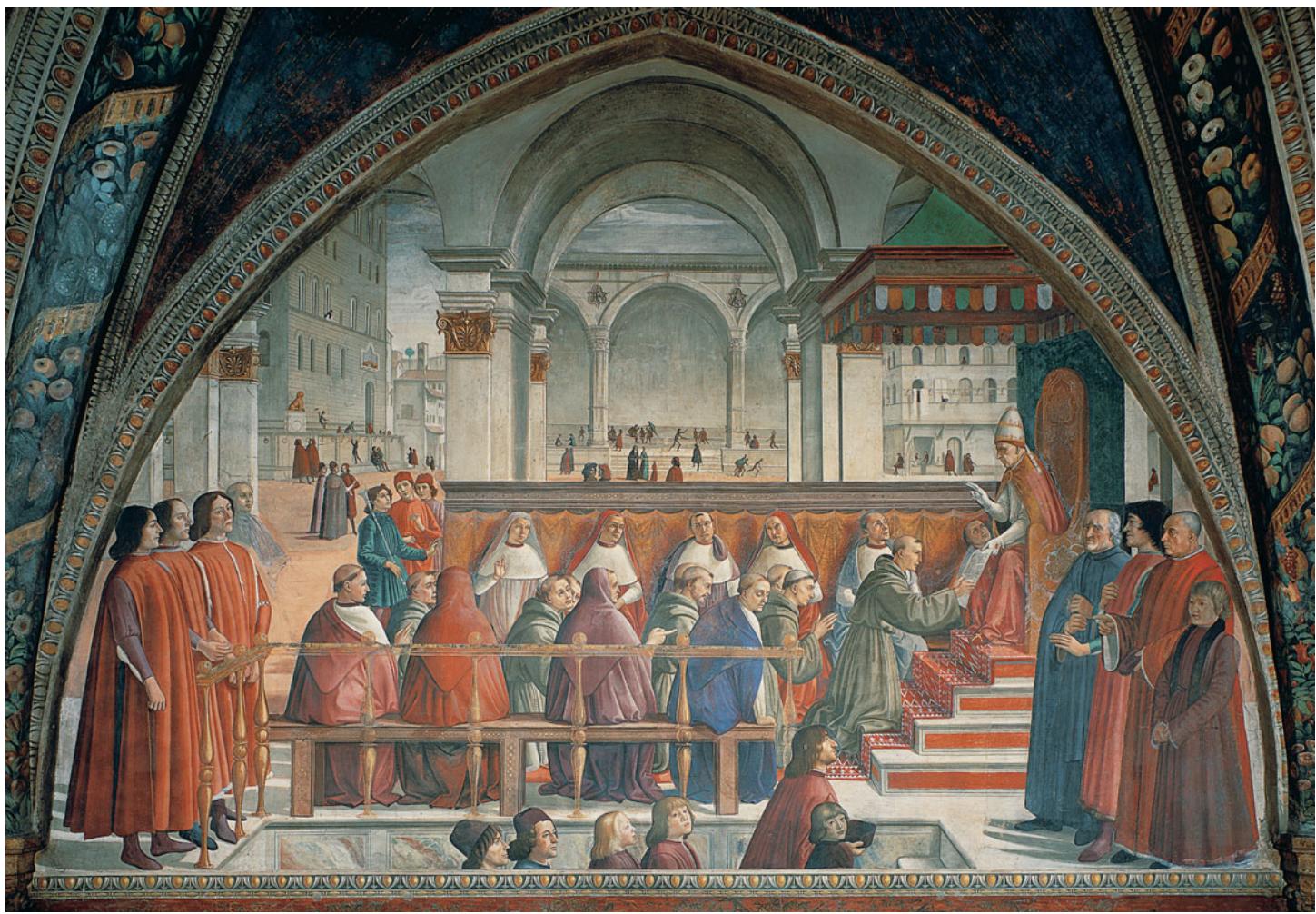
Statuettes of religious subjects were still popular, but humanist patrons were beginning to collect bronzes of Classical subjects. Many sculptors, especially those trained as goldsmiths, started to cast small copies after well-known ancient works. Some artists also executed original designs *all'antica* ("in the antique style") to appeal to a cultivated humanist taste. Hercules was always a popular figure; as a patron of Florence, he was on the city seal. Among the many courageous acts by which Hercules gained immortality was the slaying of the evil Antaeus in a wrestling match by lifting him off the earth, the source of the giant's great physical power.

An engraving by Pollaiuolo, **THE BATTLE OF THE NUDES** (FIG. 20-36), reflects two interests of Renaissance scholars—the study of Classical sculpture and anatomical research. Pollaiuolo may have intended this, his only known—but highly influential—print, as a study in composition involving the human figure in action. The naked men, fighting each other ferociously against a tapestrylike background of foliage, seem to have been drawn from a single model in a variety of poses, many of which were taken from Classical sources. Like the artist's *Hercules and Antaeus*, much of the engraving's fascination lies in its depiction of the muscles of the male body reacting under tension, more impressive than accurate—anatomical accuracy was clearly not the point.

20-37 • Domenico Ghirlandaio **SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS; ALTARPIECE WITH NATIVITY AND ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS**

Sassetti Chapel, church of Santa Trinità, Florence. 1483–1486. Fresco, chapel 12'2" deep × 17'2" wide (3.7 × 5.25 m).





20-38 • Domenico Ghirlandaio **CONFIRMATION OF THE FRANCISCAN RULE BY POPE HONORIUS III**
Sassetti Chapel, church of Santa Trinità, Florence. 1483–1486. Fresco, width at base 17'2" (5.25 m).

GHIRLANDAIO The most prolific later fifteenth-century Florentine painting workshop was that of Domenico di Tommaso Bigordi (1449–1494), known as “Ghirlandaio” (“Garland-Maker”), a nickname first adopted by his father, who was a goldsmith noted for his floral wreaths. A skilled storyteller, the younger Ghirlandaio reinterpreted the art of earlier fifteenth-century painters into a visual language of descriptive immediacy and structural clarity.

Among Ghirlandaio’s most impressive narrative programs was the fresco cycle of the **LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS**, commissioned by the wealthy manager of the Medici bank, Francesco Sassetti, and painted between 1483 and 1486 on the walls of the Sassetti family burial chapel in the Florentine church of Santa Trinità (FIG. 20-37). In the uppermost tier of the paintings (FIG. 20-38), Pope Honorius gives a confirmation of the Franciscan order to the kneeling figure of St. Francis, with the Loggia dei Lanzi and the Palazzo della Signoria (see FIG. 18-2) in the background. The foreground figures—arranged in a composition that parallels the sacred scene behind them—are portrait likenesses of well-known Florentines. At far right are (from left to right) poet Antonio Pucci, Lorenzo de’ Medici, the patron Francesco Sassetti, and his son Federigo, all

of whom seem to be receiving the approaching retinue coming up the stairs at the lower center of the fresco—humanist poet Poliziano leading his pupils, the sons of Lorenzo de’ Medici. Just below this scene, in the middle register (see FIG. 20-37), a small boy who has fallen from an upper window is resurrected by St. Francis. This miracle is likewise witnessed by contemporary Florentines, including other members of the Sassetti family and Ghirlandaio himself, and the scene takes place in the piazza outside the actual church of Santa Trinità. Ghirlandaio has thus transferred both events from thirteenth-century Rome to contemporary Florence, painting recognizable views of the city and portraits of living Florentines, delighting in local color and anecdotal detail. Perhaps Renaissance painters, like Gothic painters, represented sacred narratives in contemporary settings to emphasize their current relevance, or perhaps they and their patrons simply enjoyed seeing themselves dressed in their finery, witnessing these dramas within the cities of which they were justifiably proud.

The altarpiece Ghirlandaio painted for the Sassetti Chapel portrays the **NATIVITY AND ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS** (FIG. 20-39). It is still in its original frame, still in the



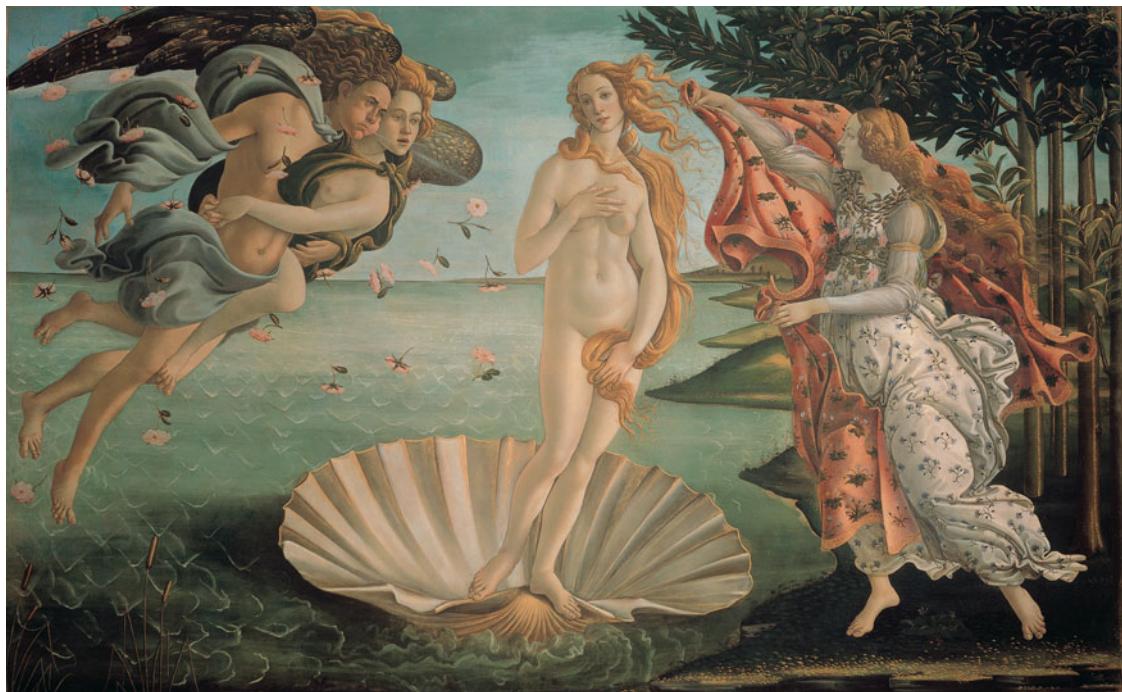
20-39 • Domenico Ghirlandaio NATIVITY AND ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS
Altarpiece in the Sassetti Chapel, church of Santa Trinità, Florence. 1485. Panel, 65¾" square (1.67 m square).

place for which it was painted (see FIG. 20-37). The influence of Hugo van der Goes's Portinari Altarpiece (see FIG. 19-19), which had been placed on the high altar of the church of Sant'Egidio two years earlier, in 1483, is strong. Ghirlandaio's Christ Child also lies on the ground, adored by the Virgin while rugged shepherds kneel at the right. Ghirlandaio even copies some of Hugo's flowers—although here the iris, a symbol of the Passion, springs not from a vase, but from the earth in the lower right corner. But Ghirlandaio highlights references to Classical Rome. First to catch the eye are the two Classical pilasters with Corinthian capitals, one of which is dated by inscription to 1485. The manger is an ancient sarcophagus with an inscription that promises resurrection (as in the fresco directly above the altarpiece where St. Francis is reviving a child); and in the distance a Classical arch inscribed with a reference to the

Roman general Pompey the Great frames the road along which the Magi travel. Weighty, restrained actors replace the psychologically intense figures of Hugo's painting. Ghirlandaio joins a clear foreground, middle ground, and background in part by the road and in part by **aerial perspective**, which creates a seamless transition of color, from the sharp details and primary hues of the Adoration to the soft gray mountains in the distance.

BOTTICELLI Like most artists in the second half of the fifteenth century, Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi (1445–1510), called “Botticelli” (“the little barrel,” a nickname borrowed from his older brother), painted sculptural figures that were modeled by light from a consistent source and placed in a setting rendered illusionistic by linear perspective. An outstanding portraitist, he, like

20-40 • Sandro Botticelli BIRTH OF VENUS
c. 1484–1486. Tempera and gold on canvas, 5'8 $\frac{7}{8}$ " × 9'1 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (1.8 × 2.8 m). Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



Ghirlandaio, often included recognizable contemporary figures among the saints and angels in religious paintings. He worked in Florence, often for the Medici, then was called to Rome in 1481 by Pope Sixtus IV to help decorate the new Sistine Chapel along with Ghirlandaio, Perugino, and other artists.

Botticelli returned to Florence that same year and entered a new phase of his career. Like other artists working for patrons steeped in Classical scholarship and humanistic thought, he was exposed to philosophical speculations on beauty—as well as to the examples of ancient art in his employers’ collections. For the Medici, Botticelli produced secular paintings of mythological subjects inspired by ancient works and by contemporary Neoplatonic thought. Art historian Michael Baxandall has shown that these works were also patterned on the slow movements of fifteenth-century Florentine dance, in which figures acted out their relationships to one another in public performances that would have influenced the thinking and viewing habits of both painters and their audience.

The overall appearance of Botticelli’s *Primavera*, or *Spring* (see “A Closer Look,” page 628), recalls Flemish tapestries (see FIG. 19-8), which were very popular in Italy at the time. And its subject—like the subjects of many tapestries—is a highly complex **allegory** (a symbolic illustration of a concept or principle), interweaving Neoplatonic ideas with esoteric references to Classical sources. In simple terms, Neoplatonic philosophers and poets conceived Venus, the goddess of love, as having two natures. The first ruled over earthly, human love and the second over universal, divine love. In this way the philosophers could argue that Venus was a Classical equivalent of the Virgin Mary. *Primavera* was painted at the time of the wedding of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici and Semiramide d’Appiano in 1482. The theme suggests

love and fertility in marriage, and the painting can be read as a lyrical wish for a similar fecundity in the union of Lorenzo and Semiramide—a sort of highly refined fertility dance.

Several years later, some of the same mythological figures reappeared in Botticelli’s **BIRTH OF VENUS** (FIG. 20-40), in which the central image represents the Neoplatonic idea of divine love in the form of a nude Venus based on an antique statue type known as the “modest Venus” that ultimately derives from Praxiteles’ *Aphrodite of Knidos* (see FIG. 5-53). Botticelli’s Classical goddess of love and beauty, born of sea foam, averts her eyes from our gaze as she floats ashore on a scallop shell, carefully arranging her hands and hair to hide—but actually drawing attention to—her sexuality. Indeed, she is an arrestingly alluring figure, set within a graceful composition organized by Botticelli’s characteristically decorative, almost calligraphic use of line. Blown by the wind—Zephyr (with his love, the nymph Chloris)—Venus arrives at her earthly home. She is welcomed by a devotee who offers her a garment embroidered with flowers. The circumstances of this commission are uncertain. It is painted on canvas, which suggests that it may have been a banner or a painted tapestrylike wall hanging.

Botticelli’s later career was apparently affected by a profound spiritual crisis. While the artist was creating his mythologies for the Medici, a Dominican monk, Fra Girolamo Savonarola (active in Florence 1490–1498), was preaching impassioned sermons denouncing the worldliness of Florence. Many Florentines reacted with orgies of self-recrimination, and processions of weeping penitents wound through the streets. Botticelli, too, may have fallen into a state of religious fervor. In a dramatic gesture of repentance, he burned many of his earlier paintings and began to produce highly emotional pictures pervaded by an intense religiosity.

A CLOSER LOOK | *Primavera*

by Sandro Botticelli, c. 1482. Tempera on wood panel.

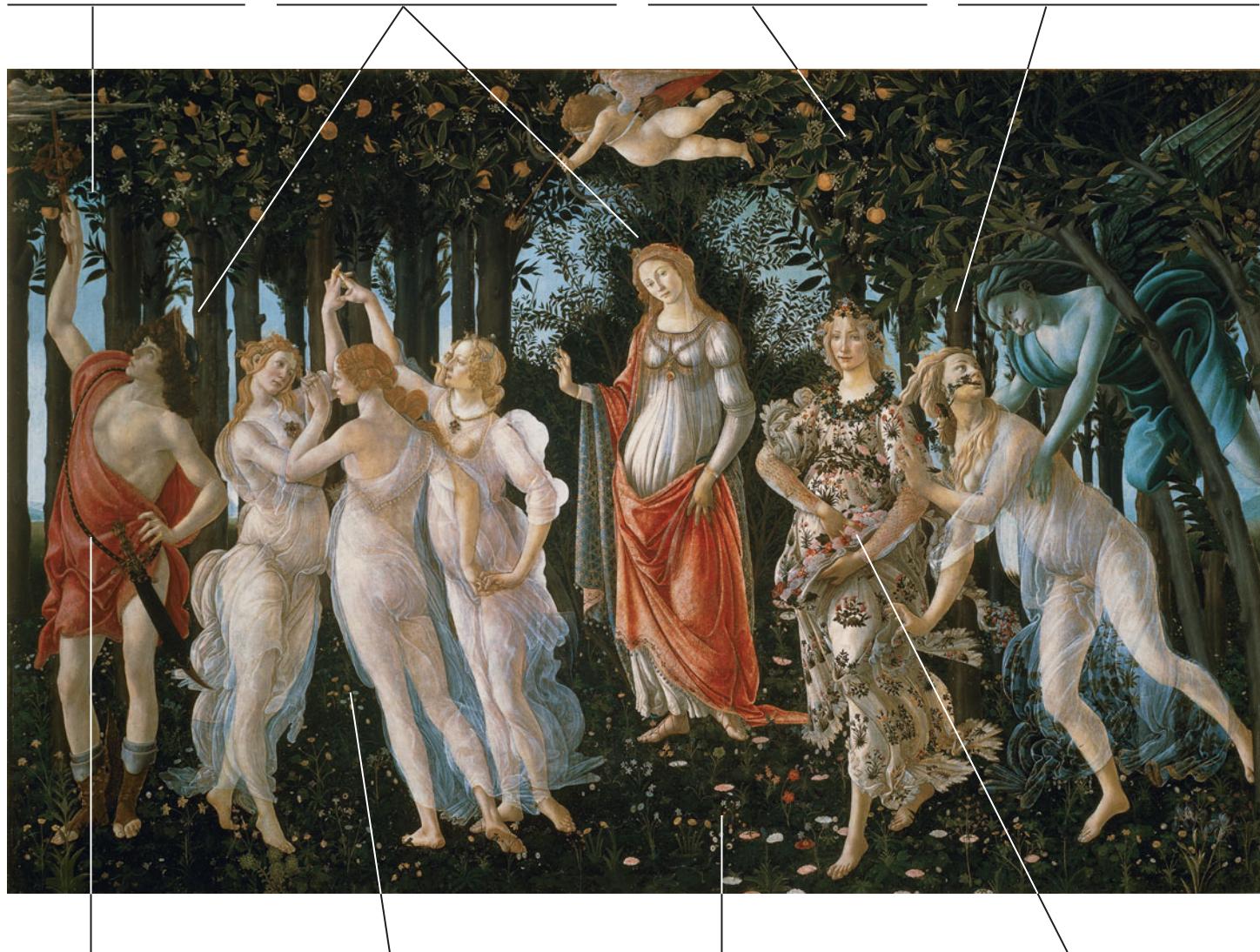
6'8" x 10'4" (2.03 x 3.15 m). Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Mercury, the sign for the month of May, disperses the winter clouds with his caduceus. This staff, wound about with serpents, became a symbol for the medical profession. The name Medici means "doctors."

Venus, clothed in contemporary costume and crowned with a marriage wreath, appears in her role as the goddess of wedded love. The presence of both Venus and Mercury may be an astrological reference; prominent Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino told Lorenzo de' Medici that these planets were aligned in his horoscope.

The setting of the painting is a grove of orange trees. These hold a double meaning—both suggestive of Venus' Garden of the Hesperides, with its golden fruit, and perhaps an allusion to the Medici, whose coat of arms featured golden orbs.

This three-figure grouping tells a story. Zephyrus, the west wind, is accosting the virgin nymph Chloris, identifiable from the roses pouring out of her mouth. Once Zephyrus makes her his bride, Chloris is transformed into the goddess Flora, the elaborately dressed personification of spring at the front of the group.



The gold flames decorating Mercury's garment are also an attribute of St. Lawrence, the namesake of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, for whom this painting was made. The laurel tree (*laurus* in Latin) behind Zephyrus also alludes to Lorenzo's name.

The Three Graces symbolize ideal female virtues—Chastity, Beauty, Love. Venus' son Cupid—the embodiment of romantic desire—playfully aims his arrow at them.

So accurate is their representation, 138 of the 190 flowering plants depicted in the painting have been identified. Almost all grow in the neighborhood of Florence between the months of March and April, and most carry symbolic associations with love and marriage.

Flora scatters flowers held in a fold of her dress at the level of her womb, equating the fecundity brought about by changing seasons with female procreative fertility.

 [View](http://myartslab.com) the Closer Look for *Primavera* on myartslab.com

VENICE

In the last quarter of the fifteenth century, Venice emerged as a major Renaissance art center. Ruled as an oligarchy (government by a select few) with an elected duke (*doge* in the Venetian dialect), the city government was founded at the end of the Roman Empire and survived until the Napoleonic era. In building their city, the Venetians had turned marshes into a commercial seaport, and they saw the sea as a resource, not a threat. They depended on naval power and on the natural defense of their lagoons rather than city walls. Venice turned toward the east, especially after the crusaders' conquest of Constantinople in 1204, designing the church of St. Mark as a great Byzantine building sheathed in mosaics (see FIG. 8-24A). In addition to its long history of painting and sculpture, Venice excelled in the arts of textiles and jewelry, gold and enamel, glass and mosaic, fine printing and bookbinding.

VENETIAN PALACES Venice was a city of waterways with few large public spaces. Even palaces had only small interior courtyards and tiny gardens, and were separated by narrow alleys. Their façades overlooked the canals, permitting owners to project on these major thoroughfares the large portals, windows, and loggias that proclaimed their importance through the lavishness of their residences—a sharp contrast to the fortresslike character of most Florentine town houses (see FIG. 20-7). But, as with the Florentine great houses, Venetian owners combined in these structures a place of business with a dwelling.

The **CA D'ORO** (House of Gold), home of the wealthy nobleman Marino Contarini, has a splendid front with three superimposed loggias facing the Grand Canal (FIG. 20-41). The house was constructed between 1421 and 1437, and its asymmetrical elevation is based on a traditional Byzantine plan. A wide central hall ran from front to back all the way through the building to a small inner courtyard with a well and garden. An outside stair led to the main floor on the second level. The entrance on the canal permitted goods to be delivered directly into the warehouse that constituted the ground floor. The principal floor, on the second level, had a salon and reception room opening on the richly decorated loggia. It was filled with light from large windows, and more light reflected off the polished terrazzo floor. Private family rooms

filled the upper stories. Contarini's instructions to his contractors and workers specified that the façade was to be painted with white enamel and ultramarine blue and that the red stones in the patterned wall should be oiled to make them even brighter. Details of carving, such as coats of arms and balls on the crest at the roofline, were to be gilded. Beautiful as the palace is today, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it must have been truly spectacular.

THE BELLINI BROTHERS The domes of the church of St. Mark dominated the city center, and the rich colors of its glowing mosaics captured painters' imaginations. Perhaps it was their love of color that encouraged the Venetian painters to embrace the oil medium for both panel and canvas painting.

The most important Venetian artists of this period were two brothers: Gentile (c. 1429–1507) and Giovanni (c. 1430–1516) Bellini, whose father, Jacopo (c. 1400–1470), had also been a central figure in Venetian art. Andrea Mantegna became part of this circle when he married Jacopo's daughter in 1453.

Gentile Bellini celebrated the daily life of the city in large, lively narratives, such as the **PROCESSION OF THE RELIC OF THE TRUE CROSS BEFORE THE CHURCH OF ST. MARK** (FIG. 20-42). Every year on the feast of St. Mark (April 25), the Confraternity of St. John the Evangelist carried the miracle-working relic of the True Cross in a procession through the square in front of the church. Bellini's painting of 1496 depicts an event that had occurred in 1444: the miraculous recovery of a sick child whose father (the man in red kneeling to the right of the relic) prayed for help as the relic passed by. Gentile has rendered the cityscape with great attention to detail. The mosaic-encrusted Byzantine



20-41 • CA D'ORO (CONTARINI PALACE), VENICE
1421–1437.



**20-42 • Gentile Bellini
PROCESSION OF
THE RELIC OF THE
TRUE CROSS BEFORE
THE CHURCH OF ST.
MARK**

1496. Oil on canvas, 12' × 24'5" (3.67 × 7.45 m). Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice.

Cathedral of St. Mark (see FIG. 8-24A) forms a backdrop for the procession, and the doge's palace and base of the bell tower can be seen at the right. The gold reliquary is carried under a canopy, surrounded by marchers with giant candles, led by a choir and followed at the far right by the doge and other officials. Gentile's procession serves as a reminder that fifteenth-century piazzas and buildings were sites of ritual ceremony, and it was in moments such as this that they were brought to life.

Gentile's brother Giovanni amazed and attracted patrons with his artistic virtuosity for almost 60 years. The **VIRGIN AND CHILD ENTHRONED WITH SS. FRANCIS, JOHN THE BAPTIST, JOB, DOMINIC, SEBASTIAN, AND LOUIS OF TOULOUSE** (FIG. 20-43), painted about 1478 for the chapel of the Hospital of San Giobbe (St. Job), exhibits a dramatic perspectival view up into a tunnel vault that leads to an apse. Giovanni may have known his brother-in-law Mantegna's early experiments in radical foreshortening and in the use of a low vanishing point. Here Giovanni positions the vanishing point for the rapidly converging lines of the architecture at bottom center, just above the



20-43 • Giovanni Bellini VIRGIN AND CHILD ENTHRONED WITH SS. FRANCIS, JOHN THE BAPTIST, JOB, DOMINIC, SEBASTIAN, AND LOUIS OF TOULOUSE

(Computer reconstruction.) Originally commissioned for the chapel of the Hospital of San Giobbe, Venice. c. 1478. Oil on wood panel, 15'4" × 8'4" (4.67 × 2.54 m). Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice. The original frame is in the church of San Giobbe, Venice.

Art historians have given the special name **sacra conversazione** ("holy conversation") to this type of composition that shows saints, angels, and sometimes even the painting's donors in the same pictorial space with the enthroned Virgin and Child. Despite the name, no "conversation" or spoken interaction takes place in a literal sense. Instead, the individuals portrayed are joined in a mystical and eternal communion that occurs outside human time and space.



20-44 • Giovanni Bellini

ST. FRANCIS IN ECSTASY

c. 1470s. Oil and tempera on wood panel, 49" x 55 7/8" (125 x 142 cm). The Frick Collection, New York.

floor. His figures stand in a Classical architectural interior with a coffered barrel vault reminiscent of Masaccio's *Trinity* (see FIG. 20-19). The gold mosaic, with its identifying inscription and stylized seraphim (angels of the highest rank), recalls Byzantine art and the long tradition of Byzantine-inspired painting and mosaics produced in Venice.

THINK ABOUT IT

20.1 Explain how one Florentine sculptor discussed in this chapter helped establish the increasing naturalism and growing emulation of Classical models that would be central to the early Italian Renaissance.

20.2 Discuss Masaccio's use of linear perspective in either *The Tribute Money* or *Trinity with the Virgin, St. John the Evangelist, and Donors*. How does he use this technique? Illustrate your points with a comparative reference to a work discussed earlier in this chapter or in a previous chapter.

20.3 Choose a wealthy merchant or *condottiere* and discuss how his patronage fostered the emergence of the Renaissance in fifteenth-century Italy. Make reference to specific works in forming your answer.

20.4 Discuss the 1401 competition to choose an artist to create the bronze doors of the Florence Baptistry. How did the competition affect the careers of the two finalists, Ghiberti and Brunelleschi?

Giovanni Bellini's painting of **ST. FRANCIS IN ECSTASY** (FIG. 20-44), also from the 1470s, recalls Flemish painting in the fine detail with which he rendered the natural world. The saint stands bathed in early morning sunlight, his outspread hands displaying his stigmata. Francis had moved to a cave in the barren wilderness in his search for communion with God, but in the world Giovanni creates for him, the fields blossom and flocks of animals graze. The grape arbor over his desk adds to the atmosphere of sylvan delight. Like most of the fifteenth-century religious art we have seen, however, Bellini presents viewers with a natural world saturated in symbolism. Here a relationship between St. Francis and Moses is outlined. The tree symbolizes the burning bush; the stream, the miraculous spring brought forth by Moses. The crane and donkey represent the monastic virtue of patience. The detailed description, luminous palette, and symbolic surroundings suggest Flemish art, but the golden light suffusing the painting is unmistakably Venetian.

CROSSCURRENTS



FIG. 19-15

FIG. 20-21

Compare the representation of the human nude in these two examples of Renaissance art, one from Flanders and one from Florence. How do these works relate to the character of art in these two parts of Europe in the early fifteenth century? How do they embody the cultural expectations of their time and place?

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